

# OUTFOUGHT AND OUTTHOUGHT: REASSESSING THE MONGOL INVASIONS OF JAPAN

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## ABSTRACT

OUTFOUGHT AND OUTTHOUGHT, REASSESSING THE MONGOL INVASIONS OF JAPAN, by Major Ryon F. Adams, 123 pages.

In 1274 and 1281, the Mongol Empire attempted overseas invasions of Japan, following diplomatic efforts to make Japan submit. On both occasions, the Mongols were unsuccessful. Although the Japanese offered stiff and well-coordinated resistance, the invasions have taken on an almost mythical quality, not so much because of the brave samurai defense of Japan, but rather, due to the fact that both invasions ended disastrously for the Mongols, as storms destroyed their fleets. Many Japanese credited these storms, which came to be known in Japan as the “kamikaze,” or “divine wind,” as a sign of divine protection for the Japanese archipelago. Later, they served as a historical inspiration for the World War II (WWII) Japanese suicide pilots of the same name. However destructive those storms may have been, my research suggests that the Japanese would likely have been victorious even without the storms. The Mongols committed many diplomatic, strategic, and tactical errors during the invasions, and failed to properly apply the four instruments of national power, as well the principles of Sun Tzu. This thesis will show that the Japanese defeat of the Mongol Invasions was not primarily due to the weather, but rather, as a result of those other factors.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE THESIS APPROVAL PAGE .....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vi
ILLUSTRATIONS .....	viii
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
Sun Tzu: The Art of War .....	3
CHAPTER TWO HISTORIOGRAPHY .....	7
Introduction .....	7
Yamada's Romantic Look at the Invasions .....	9
A Counterpoint to the "Divine Intervention" Theory .....	12
Winchester: A Short Perspective on Samurai Military Prowess .....	19
Khubilai Khan: The Mongol Leader .....	20
Gathering Information on the Fighting Forces and their Methods .....	21
CHAPTER 3 THE FIGHTING FORCES .....	27
Mongol Weapons and Armor .....	29
Mongol Horsemanship .....	30
Mongol Battle Tactics .....	33
Mongol Intelligence and Espionage .....	38
Mongol Organization and Command and Control (C2) .....	38
Mongol Recruiting, Funding, and Logistics .....	39
Khubilai Khan: Mongol Leader .....	42
The Japanese Samurai, His Weapons, and Equipment .....	43
Samurai Training, Organization, and Ethos .....	46
The Samurai System of Rewards .....	49
Samurai Fortifications and Defense .....	50
Hojo Tokimune: Shogun and Japanese Leader .....	51

CHAPTER 4 THE FIRST INVASION (1274) AND AFTERMATH.....	61
Motivations for the Mongol Invasions.....	61
Early Diplomatic Efforts.....	62
Mongols Launch First Invasion Fleet .....	67
Japanese Reaction and Defensive Preparations .....	74
Mongol Reaction.....	75
CHAPTER 5 THE SECOND INVASION (1281).....	84
The Massive Invasion Fleet Gets Underway .....	84
CHAPTER 6 STRATEGIC ANALYSIS.....	91
DIME Analysis .....	91
Defensive Operational Analysis .....	94
The Superiority of the Samurai Fighters.....	96
The Concept of Tactical Culmination.....	97
CHAPTER 7 PERSPECTIVES OF SUN-TZU .....	101
Lack of Deception.....	101
The Japanese Advantage in Defense .....	103
The Ground Was a Marked Disadvantage.....	103
CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION.....	106
Mongol Aftermath .....	106
Japanese Aftermath.....	107
Relevance for Today's Officer .....	108
Final Thoughts .....	109
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	112
INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....	115

## ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Figure 1. The Mongol Empire.....	28
Figure 2. Map of Mongol Terrain (note Pamir Mountains and Steppe Areas) .....	32
Figure 3. Southern Sung Campaign .....	37
Figure 4. Samurai Figurine.....	45
Figure 5. Map of Japan Showing Kamakura and Kyoto .....	47
Figure 6. Map of Hakata Bay .....	68
Figure 7. Map of Mongol Invasion Routes .....	71



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish . . . the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to their nature.<sup>1</sup>

Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

The 13th Century Mongol invasions of Japan rank as the only occasion in history that the invaded nation's defenders defeated a full-strength Mongol invasion.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, they also represent the only occasion in Japan's feudal history that the samurai fighting class faced a foreign invasion, and are perhaps the only episodes in the military history of the samurai in Japan that all of the samurai in Japan united against a common adversary.<sup>3</sup> As unique as these events may be, their aftermath had far reaching effects. The Japanese saw the victories as an indication of Japan's divine protection, which later contributed to a myth of invincibility and distorted ethnocentricity. For the Mongols, by contrast, the outcome of the invasions was a crushing blow. Never had the Mongol Empire, which up until then had seemed nearly invincible, suffered such lopsided defeats.<sup>4</sup> As will be explained throughout this work, the battles also had profound effects on both ruling regimes.

One of the reasons that the Japanese may have perceived the Mongol invasions as a sign of divine intervention has to do with the fact that on both occasions, natural disasters helped bring about their end. Historians generally acknowledge that during both the 1274 and 1281 invasions, major storms contributed significantly to the Mongol defeats. Many Japanese convinced themselves that the storms were sent by their gods and referred to them thereafter as the *kamikaze*, or "divine wind."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, many

historians concur that the Japanese could not have defeated the Mongols without the aid of the weather. Nakaba Yamada, author of one of the most comprehensive English-language works on the subject, holds the view that the storms were the decisive factor in the invasions' outcome, and he makes this point by comparing the Mongol Invasions of Japan to the 1588 defeat of the Spanish Armada by the English:

In both cases, the resolution, skill, and valour of the defenders might perhaps have failed had not the forces of Nature come at an opportune moment to their assistance, and in both the disaster which fell upon the invaders was wholesale and complete.<sup>6</sup>

However compelling this theory may be, it fails to consider the possibility that the Japanese might have been capable of winning on both occasions without the need of such storms. It is this possibility that this thesis explores: that the defeat of the Mongols during their attempted invasions of Japan in 1274 and 1281 was not primarily the result of adverse weather, but rather, was caused by failures at the strategic, operational, and tactical level, as well as by failures in following the principles of Sun Tzu. This study intends to demonstrate that a variety of factors, weather not included, were the primary cause of the Mongol defeat. These include strategic errors related to the sending of emissaries, the failure by the Mongols in information warfare to achieve surprise on the battlefield, the superior preparations and defensive planning by the Japanese, the superior fighting ability of the Japanese samurai, the problems the Mongols faced fighting an enemy outside their typical land environment, and several key tactical decisions made by the Mongols during the invasions themselves. This thesis will demonstrate, using the writings of Sun-Tzu and others how the Mongol invasions were inconsistent with the principles that might foster successful warfare. Moreover, this thesis will show that the

Mongol invasions of Japan in 1274 and 1281 were largely inconsistent with the manner that the Mongols typically waged war.

The primary research question is to determine the paramount cause of the Mongol defeat. Secondary questions include determining whether these factors played a greater role in the Mongol defeat than the storms faced by their fleets, and explaining exactly how these factors played a role. The thesis will also consider how fighting in an environment outside the vast expanses of Asia possibly hindered the Mongol efforts, and to what degree alliances failed them. Additionally, there will be an extensive discussion of the warriors and fighting styles of the two adversaries, with a goal of determining whether either side enjoyed an advantage in tactics, training, and logistics. Finally, this thesis will examine both the diplomatic embassies that the Mongols attempted with the Japanese, and the invasions themselves, with special consideration to the correct decisions made by the Japanese, and the errors made by the Mongols.

Before going into such details, it is worthwhile to consider the existing historical sources and viewpoints on the invasions as well as the principles of war described by Sun Tzu. While the number of sources on the invasions written in English or in English translation on the subject is relatively limited, the existing sources do provide a significant amount of information. Moreover, historians of the invasion hold a number of divergent viewpoints on what led to the invasions' outcomes.

### Sun Tzu: The Art of War

Probably the most influential Chinese treatise on the principles of warfare is *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu. The work has greatly influenced both Chinese and Japanese military leaders, and has supplied much of their doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Its exact date of composition

is somewhat disputed, but most scholars have dated it to the Chinese Warring States Period (453-221 BCE).<sup>8</sup> The book represents the earliest known attempt to develop a logical basis for military operations.<sup>9</sup> It is designed primarily as a guide to rulers on the successful prosecution of warfare, and considers not only the physical aspects of war, but also the moral, intellectual, and circumstantial, and is based on the premise that wars are best if won without fighting.<sup>10</sup> The book looks at warfare at nearly all levels, and considers activities such as spying, information warfare, economics, logistics, planning, operations, and political/military leadership.<sup>11</sup>

The work is broken down into chapters, each of which deals, very generally, with a specific topic, such as estimates, maneuver, terrain, marches, energy, and the employment of secret agents. Within each chapter, dozens of short, axiomatic statements provide general principles for guiding military decision-making. It is important to note, however, that the book does not provide an overall framework for the conduct of war. In using *The Art of War* to analyze the Mongol Invasions of Japan, axiomatic expressions will be drawn from various parts of the book, without regard to any particular framework, in order to analyze various aspects of the Mongol strategy, tactics, and decisions, and determine whether or not the Mongols conducted the invasions in accordance with Sun-Tzu's principles.

It is worth noting that none of the sources that contributed to this thesis specifically claim that the Mongol leader, Khubilai Khan, ever read Sun-Tzu. However, it is known that Khubilai Khan completed the conquest of China, and incorporated many Chinese advisors in his entourage.<sup>12</sup> Many of Khubilai's contemporaries were struck by the heavy concentration of Chinese, rather than Mongol attendants and advisors in his

entourage, and some even complained that Khubilai seemed to identify more closely with his Chinese subjects than others.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Fan Wen-Hu, one of the generals that Khubilai appointed to lead the 1281 invasion, was Chinese, as were most of the warriors involved.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, *The Art of War's* influence on the Sung Dynasty, which designated the book one of the seven “Martial Classics,” and which Khubilai succeeded in conquering and adding to his empire, was well-known.<sup>15</sup> Given those facts, it is certainly plausible to assume that Khubilai Khan’s Chinese generals and advisors would have at least been familiar with Sun-Tzu and would have known his principles. However, this thesis will show that Sun-Tzu’s principles were not always followed. The next chapter provides an analysis of the various historical perspectives on the Mongol Invasions of Japan, and then proceeds to discuss other historical works that provide insight into the persons and places involved.

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<sup>1</sup>Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 30.

<sup>2</sup>Mark Winchester, *The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (UK: Belgarun, 2008), 12; and Timothy May, *The Mongol Art of War* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2007), 24. Technically, Mongols invasions were defeated twice, once by the Mamluks in 1260, and then by the Japanese in 1274 and 1281. However, the Mongol force during the 1260 Mamluk defeat was undersized. The invasions of Japan represent the only occasion upon which a full-strength Mongol Army was defeated by the nation that they invaded.

<sup>3</sup>Stephen Turnbull, *The Samurai: A Military History* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1977), 84.

<sup>4</sup>Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 212.

<sup>5</sup>Charles O. Hucker, *China's Imperial Past* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), 285.

<sup>6</sup>Nakaba Yamada, *Ghenko: The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1916), 212-213.

<sup>7</sup>Sun-Tzu, *The Art of War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1963), xi.  
Preface by Samuel B. Griffith.

<sup>8</sup>Sun-Tzu, *The Art of War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1963), 1.  
Introduction by Samuel B. Griffith.

<sup>9</sup>Sun-Tzu, *The Art of War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1963) x.  
Preface by Samuel B. Griffith.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, x.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, x-xi.

<sup>12</sup>Rossabi, 118.

<sup>13</sup>Robert Marshall, *Storm from the East* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 195.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>15</sup>Sun-Tzu, *The Art of War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1963), 1.  
Introduction by Samuel B. Griffith. According to Griffith, the Sung emperor Sheng-Tsung (1068-1085) not only designated *The Art of War* a “Martial Classic,” but also made its study obligatory for individuals aspiring to a commission in the Imperial Army. Certainly any Sung General would have been familiar with the work, and since Khubilai Khan succeeded in conquering the Sung Dynasty and adding its forces to his empire, one can only assume that the Chinese leadership within Khan’s military hierarchy would have been familiar with its principles.

## CHAPTER TWO

### HISTORIOGRAPHY

#### Introduction

A survey of the existing historical literature on the Mongol Invasions yields a wide diversity of opinions. A majority of historians that have written about the two invasions concede that the Japanese samurai fought bravely and skillfully against the Mongol invaders, but attribute their ultimate victory to the arrival of two major storms that destroyed the invading fleets. A minority of historians, however, argue that the storms were of lesser importance, and that the Japanese would likely have been victorious even in the absence of the storms. One historian, Thomas Conlan, has taken this position, while also arguing that in the case of the first invasion, a major storm might not have actually occurred, and that estimates of the size of the fighting forces in the two invasions have been greatly exaggerated. Only a handful of works dealing specifically with the Mongol Invasions of Japan have been written, and these include Nakaba Yamada's *Ghenko: The Mongol Invasions of Japan*, Thomas Conlan's *In Little Need of Divine Intervention*, and David Winchester's *The Mongol Invasions of Japan*. In other cases, more general histories of the Mongols, Chinese, and Japanese have sections of their work devoted to those events.<sup>1</sup>

The number of primary sources on the Mongol Invasions of Japan in English is quite limited. Naturally, contemporary accounts of the invasions written in Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Mongolian, and others, are inaccessible to Western scholars that are not well-versed in the medieval versions of those languages. However, a few excellent primary sources do exist in translation. Thomas Conlan's *In Little Need of Divine*

*Intervention* is an outstanding example of such a source. Conlan's work contains English-language translations of the several Japanese writings from the period, including scrolls prepared by a veteran of the campaigns, and translations of letters and orders written by Japanese leaders. Other secondary sources contain quotes from the period that provide additional insight into the invasions.

In addition to various histories of the period, some archaeological work has also been done in recent years to try to uncover artifacts from the invasions. One archeologist, James Delgado, has made a significant contribution in that regard. Delgado helped to find a large Mongol vessel shipwrecked off the coast of Japan that has yielded a number of interesting discoveries. This thesis notably draws upon one of his articles that was published in *Archaeology* magazine.<sup>2</sup>

The research required for this thesis would not be complete if it were limited to historians that merely wrote about the invasions themselves. In order to understand the invasions, and the people involved in them thoroughly, it is also necessary to read secondary sources that discuss the tactics, techniques, procedures, capabilities, and governments of the two sides. In that regard, scholars such as Morris Rossabi, Timothy Way, Thomas Allsen, Robert Marshall, and David Morgan have written a number of excellent books about the Mongols and their leaders. All of these scholars extensively discuss the Mongol methods of warfare, which differed in many ways from the tactics that they employed during the Mongol invasions of Japan. Understanding these differences is important, because, as this thesis argues, one major disadvantage facing the Mongols was their inability to employ their customary tactics during the campaign. Rossabi's work, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times*, as well as Robert Marshall's *Storm*



*from the East*, also provide insight into the rationale of the Mongol leadership in deciding to conduct the invasions.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, several excellent sources exist that discuss the fighting capabilities of the Japanese samurai. Stephen Turnbull's *The Samurai: A Military History* is the best of these works. Mark Winchester's *The Mongol Invasions of Japan* also provides a great deal of information on the samurai and their fighting skills in addition to providing outstanding information on the invasions.<sup>4</sup>

The preparation of this thesis likewise required consultation of several more general sources. There is a large volume of good information on the Japanese leadership in comprehensive works on Japanese history such as Mikiso Hane's *Premodern Japan: A Historical Survey*, and George Sansom's *A History of Japan to 1334*. Thomas Conlan's previously mentioned work is also very revealing, particularly because it includes a large volume of translated contemporary correspondence from the Japanese leadership.

One prior MMAS thesis, as well as a few book reviews, and some general works on Chinese history also contributed to this thesis. This section will highlight several of the most important works, discuss their viewpoints, and illustrate how they differ. No study of the Mongol Invasions of Japan would be complete without first reading the most complete historical analysis in English on the subject: Nakaba Yamada's *Ghenko: The Mongol Invasions of Japan*.

#### Yamada's Romantic Look at the Invasions

Easily the most complete and detailed historical work on the 13th Century Mongol Invasions of Japan written in English is Nakaba Yamada's 1916 work *Ghenko: The Mongol Invasions of Japan*. Although it is almost a century old, it remains the single

most comprehensive English language account of the Mongol Invasions. The book provides an “orthodox” view of the events, insofar as it compliments the skill and bravery of the Japanese leaders and warriors that resisted the Mongol assaults, but at the same time, concedes that storms were likely the decisive factor on both occasions.<sup>5</sup>

Yamada’s work is useful, in part, because it provides a detailed account of some of the minor skirmishes that took place during the campaigns. For example, Yamada dedicates nearly an entire chapter to discussing the initial assaults during the first Mongol invasion upon the islands of Tsushima and Iki.<sup>6</sup> As this thesis will illustrate, those preliminary battles were important because they alerted the Japanese forces on the main island of Kyushu to the Mongol presence, took away any element of surprise, and gave the Japanese the opportunity to effectively muster for the defense of the homeland.<sup>7</sup>

*Ghenko* also includes an entire chapter on the relations between the Japanese and the Koreans, and between the Mongols and Koreans. Yamada’s treatment of these relations is relevant for a number of reasons. In the first place, Yamada discusses the long history of trade and relations between Japan and Korea. This relationship bred Korean familiarity with the Japanese, and later led the Koreans to advise the Mongols against an invasion.<sup>8</sup> Later, Yamada discusses Mongol efforts to subjugate Korea (then known as Koryu) and turn it into a vassal state.<sup>9</sup> This is also important because Korea provided the sailors and naval vessels for the first Mongol invasion, and likewise provided a significant portion of the fighting forces in the second invasion.<sup>10</sup> The Korean port of Happon, near modern Pusan, South Korea, eventually served as the sole seaport of embarkation for the first invasion, as well as one of two seaports of embarkation for the second invasion.<sup>11</sup>

Yamada also provides a chapter on the various diplomatic embassies that Khubilai Khan, the Mongol leader, sent to Japan prior to the two invasions. As this thesis will explain, these embassies proved to be major failures for the Mongols. For one thing, their coercive and confrontational nature caused a hostile reaction from the Japanese, and led them to begin preparations for a possible Mongol invasion.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, as this thesis will describe, the hostile Japanese reception to later Mongol embassies helped provoke the anger of Khubilai Khan and likely contributed to the second invasion.<sup>13</sup>

*Ghenko* also provides very detailed descriptions of the fighting that took place on the Japanese mainland because of the two invasions, and subsequent chapters of this thesis will provide a closer look at these battles. It is interesting to note, however, that Yamada's work contains one major discrepancy when compared to every other source consulted for this thesis. Yamada claims that the first of the two Mongol invasions took place in 1275 rather than 1274.<sup>14</sup> Because the scholarly consensus outside of Yamada's work lists 1274 as the date of the first Mongol invasion, this thesis will assume that the first invasion took place in 1274.

Besides *Ghenko*, there is one other English language historical monograph on the Mongol Invasion of Japan: Thomas Conlan's *In Little Need of Divine Intervention*. It is interesting to contrast Conlan's work to Yamada's for one very important reason: Conlan, unlike Yamada, believes that storms were not critical to the Japanese victory, and that the superior tactics and fighting skills of the Japanese would have enabled them to win without the assistance of the weather.<sup>15</sup>

### A Counterpoint to the “Divine Intervention” Theory

Among those historians that take the position that the Japanese could have defeated the Mongols without the assistance of storms, Thomas Conlan is one of the most notable. In his 2001 monograph, *In Little Need of Divine Intervention: Takezaki Suenaga’s Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan*, Conlan uses primary sources to show that the Japanese level of military sophistication was very high indeed and would have been enough to defeat the Mongols.<sup>16</sup>

Conlan’s work begins with thorough English language translations of scrolls compiled by Takezaki Suenaga, a samurai veteran of both the 1274 and 1281 Mongol invasions. Suenaga’s collection of writings, *Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions (Moko Shurai ektoha in Japanese)* is one of the few primary sources translated into English.<sup>17</sup> Suenaga was a retainer of the bakufu, Japan’s military government at the time, and apparently led five warriors into battle during the 1274 invasion.<sup>18</sup> Although Suenaga commissioned the scrolls, he most likely did not write more than one section of them, as the scrolls display five different calligraphic styles.<sup>19</sup> Japan’s Museum of the Imperial Collections has retained the scrolls since 1989, which previously remained in private hands.<sup>20</sup> While the veracity of the scrolls has been debated, they are nevertheless considered an important primary source of information on the Mongol invasions.<sup>21</sup>

The scrolls are particularly valuable in describing the complex system of rewards that accrued to successful samurai fighting men. In particular, Suenaga’s narrative speaks of his need to have a witness for his brave deeds in the hopes that he might receive a reward from the Kamakura government:

“Did you take any enemy heads? Were any of your men killed?” Yasumori asked.

“No heads taken. None were killed.” I replied.

“If that’s the case, then you have not performed sufficient battle service. Other than being wounded, you did nothing at all. How can (Kamakura’s response) be insufficient?” Yasumori countered.

“So I cannot have an audience with the lord because my deeds of having been first in battle were not recorded in the battle report. But if you have any doubts about my truthfulness and need proof, why don’t you dispatch an edict to Kagesuke and ask him about it. If he writes an oath declaring that my statements are false then not only can you ignore my military deeds, but you can take my head!”<sup>22</sup>

Later, after much bickering, Yasumori agreed to recognize Suenaga’s accomplishments:

As I countered Yasumori for the third time, he relented. “Very well. I acknowledge your deeds in battle. I will state that your deeds should be seen [by higher authorities] and am sure that rewards shall be directly granted to you as you wish. Return now to your province and prepare to perform military service once again.”<sup>23</sup>

These passages indicate that the Japanese samurai had a system of mobilizing men for battle and rewarding them for service rendered that was quite complex and bureaucratic. This indicates a high level of military sophistication. However, even more illustrative on that point are some of Suenaga’s battle accounts that show that the samurai possessed a high level of tactical skill. Consider, for example, this description of a Japanese raiding party that went out in their own boat to attack the Mongol fleet:

I told Takamasa: “I don’t think that (the invaders) will fight with abandon, fearing not for their life, until we board their enemy ships. When we get close to their ships, take a ‘bear claw’ (a grappling hook) and capture them alive. They will prefer capture to death, for they want to return to their foreign lands. Once we have them hooked, stab them by impaling them where there is a joint in their armor.”<sup>24</sup>

This account shows that the samurai certainly had some idea of what they were doing when it came to fighting a close-in naval battle, and also had a good working knowledge

of how to best disable the enemy fighters in hand-to-hand combat. It also demonstrates that some of their attackers might not have had the strongest will to resist, contributing further to the Japanese victory.

In addition to the scrolls, Conlan's work also uses English translations of other Japanese military correspondence to demonstrate the extent of Japanese military preparations for the Mongols. In one such letter, the Kamakura government issued a mobilization order for the entire Aki province upon learning that the Mongols had attacked the nearby islands of Tsushima and Aki on their way to the Japanese mainland:

According to a report by Kakuei, the Mongols have attacked Tsushima and Iki Islands and already battle is being waged. Quickly depart for Aki (province) prior to the twentieth day of this month. If the invaders attack, mobilize the jito gokenin and those residents who possess full administrative authority over their lands throughout the province and offer no resistance. There must be no further negligence. This order is so conveyed.<sup>25</sup>

Such an order indicates that preparations for mobilization were likely made beforehand, allowing for execution on short notice. As this thesis will discuss later, the Mongols likely lost the element of surprise as a result of these preliminary assaults, and this gave the Japanese the opportunity to mount a defense. Regardless, the document shows that Japan was already well prepared to respond to the Mongol attacks, and this level of preparation and military sophistication could, conceivably, have contributed to its ultimate victory.

Further evidence of the sophistication of the Japanese military preparation is evident in correspondence related to the need to fortify Hakata Bay against a possible second invasion by building a stone wall around the harbor:

As for the construction of a stone wall in strategic areas in order to guard against the foreigners: commissioners shall levy corvees throughout the province on an equal basis, except for those who will be setting off for Korea. Prior to the

twentieth day of this month, dispatch laborers to the harbor at Hakata where [they shall be placed under] the authority of shugo administration.<sup>26</sup>

Conlan doubts that storms destroyed the Mongols' first invasion fleet in 1274. He points out in his work that continental sources describe the destruction of their fleet by storms more so than any Japanese source, and that at least one major Japanese chronicle from the time, *Hachiman gudo kun*, fails to mention any storm at all.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, a diary written in 1274 by Japanese courtier Kadenokoji Kanenaka described what happened with the weather at the end of the invasion as being little more than a change in wind direction:

Someone said that several tens of thousands of invaders' boats came sailing in on the high seas. Nevertheless, suddenly, a reverse (easterly) wind blew them back to their native lands. A few of the (enemy) boats were beached. The retainers of Otomo shikibu taifu captured fifty of the invaders, bound them, and are escorting (them) to the capital. The reverse wind must have arisen (as a result of) the protection of the gods. Most wonderful!<sup>28</sup>

According to Conlan, the strong northeasterly winds simply made it easy for the Mongols to sail back, having failed to achieve their military objectives.<sup>29</sup> Their chroniclers then contrived the story of their fleet's destruction by storms because it provided a convenient excuse to explain a military defeat without damaging their military reputation.<sup>30</sup>

Conlan also expresses skepticism of the accuracy of the reported size of the forces. In his view, the reports of tens or even hundreds of thousands of forces fighting on either side is likely erroneous, and that such reports were metaphors for the size of the forces involved.<sup>31</sup> According to Conlan, the common notion that the second Mongol invasion utilized a force of over 100,000 warriors is particularly absurd because it implies that the Mongols accomplished a logistical feat comparable to the Allies during the 1944 Normandy invasions, only at a much GREATER distance (480 vs. 20 miles), and with

13th century technology.<sup>32</sup> According to Conlan, an examination of mobilization records from the time period suggest much smaller fighting forces during both invasions; perhaps no more than 10,000 on either side.<sup>33</sup>

Several critics dispute Conlan's assertions about the size of the forces involved. Wayne Farris from the University of Tennessee argues that the *Yuan Shi*, a chronicle from the later Chinese Ming dynasty, listed the size of the Mongol forces in 1281 numbering approximately 140,000 between two separate armadas.<sup>34</sup> Farris also mentions that the Chinese Historical Annals *Ben Ji* discuss the drafting of 15,000 Korean soldiers in 1279, as well as the requisition of over 900 vessels and 100,000 *dan* of grain in preparation for the second invasion.<sup>35</sup> By the time of the second invasion in 1281, China alone had a population in excess of 150 million, so it seems possible that the Mongols were capable of raising an army of 140,000 men.<sup>36</sup>

Japanese scholars such as Haruko Wakabayashi also question the accuracy of Conlan's assertions about the size of the forces involved. Wakabayashi's review mentions a book by Japanese Mongol scholar Sugiyama Masaaki that asserts that even in the first invasion, the Mongols likely had over 27,000 troops.<sup>37</sup> Clearly, Conlan's view on the size of the forces involved is a novel one.

Recent archaeological discoveries have disputed Conlan's theories about the ability of the Mongols to move such a large invasion force as a logistical feat. In 2003, archaeologist and diver James Delgado discovered the wreckage of a huge Chinese warship dating from the 1281 invasion off the coast of Kyushu.<sup>38</sup> The vessel measured over 230 feet long, about twice the size of contemporary European warships.<sup>39</sup> Analysis of the materials used in the vessel's construction showed that most of the wood came



from China's Fujian province, which is generally acknowledged as one of the ports of debarkation for the second invasion.<sup>40</sup> It is conceivable that with a large fleet of comparable vessels, it would have been feasible to move a force as large as that described by most of the sources.

The discovery also yielded large volumes of weapons, catapult balls, anchor stones, and tools, which suggest that this was well-planned, equipped, and coordinated invasion. Interestingly, about 99 percent of the artifacts discovered are of Chinese rather than Mongol origin, which is consistent with the "mainstream" view that the second invasion source consisted largely of Chinese forces.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the discovery revealed that the Mongol forces also counted exploding gunpowder bombs as a part of their arsenal. Conlan mentions that depictions of samurai dying because of explosions appear in Suenaga's scrolls but argues that later editors may have added them.<sup>42</sup> This discovery suggests that the depictions were accurate. Indeed, according to Dr. Delgado, these bombs represent the earliest evidence of seaborne explosive ordnance ever discovered.<sup>43</sup>

Another reason to believe that Conlan's assertions about the logistical impossibility of a large Mongol invasion force are incorrect stems from records of other very large overseas naval expeditions undertaken only about 100 years after the Mongol invasions by Chinese Admiral Zheng He.<sup>44</sup> During these expeditions, Zheng He's fleet included 317 ships, the largest of which were 62 "treasure ships" of over 440 feet in length, with nine masts.<sup>45</sup> Other vessels in the fleet ranged down to 200 feet and had 2,500-ton capacities. By comparison, the Spanish armada of 1588 only had 137 ships and only 7 with a capacity larger than 1,000 tons.<sup>46</sup> Christopher Columbus' largest ship could only carry 280 tons.<sup>47</sup> Given the record of medieval Chinese naval power and

vessel technology, the idea that the Mongols could have moved a force of over 100,000 for an invasion of Japan certainly seems plausible. As further evidence of seafaring prowess, at the time of Khubilai Khan, more than 200,000 vessels per year descended the Yang-tse River, and Chinese merchant fleets regularly sailed to India, Java, and Ceylon.<sup>48</sup>

Other sources question Conlan's theory that the first invasion concluded with a mere shifting of the wind. Japanese scholar Sir George Sansom remarks in *A History of Japan to 1334* that some accounts mention Mongol losses of up to 200 vessels and many personnel losses from drowning.<sup>49</sup> Nakaba Yamada also speaks of the first invasion ending via a storm, with many vessels wrecked.<sup>50</sup> From the weight of the evidence, it appears that the first invasion ended with something more than a mere shift in wind direction, although this thesis argues that any such severe weather was likely not the decisive factor.

Conlan contends that the Japanese skill in utilizing defensive fortifications was likely the decisive factor contributing to Japanese victory.<sup>51</sup> This work concurs that the Japanese skill in fortifying Hakata Bay was indeed critical to Japanese success, and was certainly a factor, outside of the weather, that contributed to Japanese victory. However, this thesis will analyze the Japanese defensive fortifications and operations through the lens of Sun-Tzu and other strategic thinkers, in order to better explain their contribution.

This thesis concurs with Conlan that it would have been possible for the Japanese to defeat the Mongols without the assistance of the weather. However, it disputes some of Conlan's other theories. Because of the items mentioned in the previous paragraphs, and because just about every other source on the subject disagrees with Conlan regarding

the size of the fighting forces during the Mongol Invasions, this thesis rejects Conlan's estimates of the size of the armies involved.

#### Winchester: A Short Perspective on Samurai Military Prowess

Mark Winchester's *The Mongol Invasions of Japan* is the third reference source that deals exclusively with the subject of the 1274 and 1281 Mongol Invasions. Like Conlan, Winchester agrees that the Japanese could have defeated the Mongols without the aid of the weather.<sup>52</sup> However, unlike Conlan, Winchester believes that the mainstream view on the size of the forces involved is correct. Moreover, Winchester's reasons for believing that the "storm" explanation for Japanese victory is inadequate stems from the fact that in 1281, the battle raged for more than two months prior to the arrival of a typhoon, with the Mongols unable to gain any advantage. This makes the traditional explanation inadequate:

In light of the fact that that the war in Japan in 1281 took place for several months prior to the Japanese victory, it is clear that traditional explanations revolving around natural disasters occurring after significant beachheads had already been established, and supposed Mongol incompetence at sea alone cannot account for the defeat of the invading forces.<sup>53</sup>

Winchester instead postulates that the skill at arms and professionalism of the elite samurai warrior class gave the Japanese a decisive advantage over the Mongols.<sup>54</sup>

To support his theory, Winchester discusses the various strategies, tactics, weapons, and armor utilized by both sides, and after comparing them, determines that the Japanese held an overall advantage. His descriptions provide much valuable material for the next chapter. Winchester also provides relevant information on the aftermath of the invasions and their subsequent effects upon the two governments.

Of the three major English-language works dealing specifically with the Mongol Invasions of Japan, this thesis most closely agrees with Winchester. However, Winchester's analysis is limited primarily to a comparison of weapons, armor, and tactics, with relatively little attention given to more over-arching factors such as strategy, leadership, and the principles of war. This thesis, while agreeing with Winchester's conclusion, will look more deeply at the strategic and operational level of war and demonstrate how the factors at that level, as well as those at the tactical level, could have affected the outcome. In addition, unlike Winchester, this thesis will take a close look at Sun-Tzu's principles of war, which would have likely been familiar to Khubilai Khan's Chinese generals, and determine where the Mongols may have failed to follow them.

#### Khubilai Khan: The Mongol Leader

Morris Rossabi's *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* is an excellent account of the rise and fall of Mongol ruler Khubilai Khan, grandson of the famed Mongol conqueror Ghenghis Khan. Rossabi's work provides more detail than most sources on the Mongol leadership and what considerations went into both the decisions to invade Japan and the steps taken to prepare for the invasions. More information on these topics can be found in later chapters of this thesis.

Rossabi's work also has an excellent chapter that describes Khubilai Khan in his role as emperor of his own Chinese dynasty. In 1279, just prior to the second Mongol Invasion of Japan, Khubilai finally succeeded in conquering the entire Chinese Sung Empire and drowned the last Sung pretender to the throne.<sup>55</sup> This made Khubilai not only the ruler of the world's largest land empire, but moreover, the emperor of a new Chinese dynasty, known as the "Yuan," a name that refers to the origin of the universe.<sup>56</sup>

This conquest is important for several reasons, which Rossabi describes in detail. First, it brought the full military resources of China under his command, including naval forces. These forces played a critical role in the second invasion. More information on that can be found in chapter 5. Second, Khubilai increasingly fell under Chinese influence, taking on a large number of Chinese advisors.<sup>57</sup> Certainly most of Khubilai's military advisors would have been familiar with Sun-Tzu. Rossabi's work is also useful because it provides a lot of information on the manner that Mongol and Chinese conscription and taxation functioned in order to help provision the invasion forces.<sup>58</sup> Finally, Rossabi's works talk extensively about Khubilai's efforts, prior to each invasion, to engage the Japanese via diplomatic channels, in the hopes of compelling their submission without combat.

#### Gathering Information on the Fighting Forces and their Methods

In addition to the above-mentioned sources, a number of different works, surveys of Mongol and Japanese history, rather than invasion monographs, provide an understanding of the techniques, tactics, and procedures of the two adversaries. For the Mongols, Timothy May's *The Mongol Art of War* and David Morgan's *The Mongols* are excellent resources. Both say relatively little about the Mongol invasions of Japan, focusing primarily on other Mongol campaigns. However, both provide detailed descriptions of Mongol logistics, tactics, arms, etc. J. J. Saunders' *The History of the Mongol Conquests*, Thomas T. Allsen's *Mongol Imperialism*, Richard McCreight's *The Mongol Warrior Epic: Masters of Thirteenth Century Maneuver Warfare*, Robert Marshall's *Storm from the East*, Michael Prawdin's *The Mongol Empire: Its Rise and*

*Legacy*, and Richard A. Gabriel's *Subotai the Valiant: Genghis Khan's Greatest General*, provide additional information on Mongol fighters and fighting methods.<sup>59</sup>

Stephen Turnbull's *The Samurai: A Military History* is an excellent reference on the Japanese samurai, their government and fighting methods. Turnbull's work also includes a fine section on the Mongol Invasions of Japan, an event Turnbull calls the samurai's "finest hour."<sup>60</sup> Additional information on the samurai can be found in more general works on Japanese history including George Sansom's *A History of Japan to 1334*, and Mikiso Hane's *Premodern Japan: A Historical Survey*. Both of those works also provide accounts of the invasions themselves. Bingham, Like, and Conroy's *A History of Asia*, a general work on Asian History, provides information on both sides.<sup>61</sup>

Chinese history surveys, such as Charles O. Hucker's *China's Imperial Past*, F.W. Mote's *Imperial China: 900-1800*, and *The Cambridge History of China* also discuss the Mongols at length. Finally, for the purposes of this thesis, Samuel B. Griffith's translation of Sun-Tzu's *The Art of War* will be used for analysis. Griffith's introduction also provides good background information on the work, and its context.<sup>62</sup>

Before we consider the invasions, it is worthwhile to consider the backgrounds, methods, leaders, and members of the two fighting forces. Analysis of their differences could help to show how one might have had an advantage over the other. Moreover, such analysis helps to provide a context for the invasions themselves.

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<sup>1</sup>General works on Chinese and Mongol history that include sections on the Mongol invasions of Japan include David Morgan's *The Mongols*, Michael Prawdin's *The Mongol Empire: Its Rise and Legacy*, Charles O. Hucker's *China's Imperial Past*, Morris Rossabi's *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times*, Bingham Conroy and Ilke's *A History of Asia*, and Robert Marshall's *Storm from the East*. General works on Japanese history that include sections on these events include Stephen Turnbull's *The Samurai: A*

*Military History*, George Sansom's *A History of Japan to 1334*, and Mikiso Hane's *Pre-Modern Japan: A Historical Survey*.

<sup>2</sup>James Delgado, "Relics of the Kamikaze," *Archaeology* 56, no. 1 (January/February 2003). Please note that while this article was published in paper form, I obtained it online at the following address:  
<http://www.archaeology.org/0301/etc/kamikaze.html> (accessed March 6, 2009).

<sup>3</sup>Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 99; and Robert Marshall, *Storm from the East* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 220.

<sup>4</sup>Stephen Turnbull, *The Samurai: A Military History* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1977), 17-19, 44-60; and Mark Winchester, *The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (UK: Belgarun Limited, 2008), 27-32.

<sup>5</sup>Nakaba Yamada, *Ghenko: The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1916), 212-213.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 133-135.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 43-55.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 106, 195, 200.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 106, 195.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 80-83.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 102, 150-173.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas D. Conlan, *In Little Need of Divine Intervention: Takezaki Suenaga's Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 255.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 88-89.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 205.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 235.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 266.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 266-267

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 267.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 259.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 261

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 255.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 261-264.

<sup>34</sup>Wayne Farris, review of *In Little Need of Divine Intervention: Takezaki Suenaga's Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan* by Thomas D. Conlan, *Journal of Japanese Studies* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 418.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 419.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Haruko Wakabayashi, review of *In Little Need of Divine Intervention: Takezaki Suenaga's Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan*, by Thomas D. Conlan, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 31, no. 1 (2004): 212.

<sup>38</sup>Delgado.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.



<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Norman Hammond, "Explosive evidence found in a 13th century shipwreck off the coast of Japan." *The Times*, January 17, 2003.

<sup>44</sup>F. W. Mote, *Imperial China: 900-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 613.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 614-615.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 615.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 614.

<sup>48</sup>J. J. Saunders, *The History of the Mongol Conquests* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 125.

<sup>49</sup>George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 442.

<sup>50</sup>Yamada, 146-147.

<sup>51</sup>Conlan, 267.

<sup>52</sup>Mark Winchester, *The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (UK: Belgarun Limited, 2008), 11.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>55</sup>Rossabi, 208.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 132-142.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 212.

<sup>59</sup>Timothy May, *The Mongol Art of War* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2007), 27-85; David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publisher, 1986), 32, 85-117, 120-121; J. J. Saunders, *The History of the Mongol Conquests* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 122-126; Thomas T. Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 77-216; Richard D. McCreight, "The Mongol Warrior Epic: Masters of Thirteenth Century Maneuver Warfare" (MMAS Thesis, Command and General Staff College, 1983), 32-44; Robert Marshall, *Storm from the East* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 220-221; Michael Prawdin, *The Mongol Empire: Its Rise and Legacy* (New York,

NY: The MacMillan Company, 1940), 330-340; Richard A. Gabriel, *Subotai the Valiant: Genghis Khan's Greatest General* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 25-46.

<sup>60</sup>Stephen Turnbull, *The Samurai: A Military History* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1977), 84.

<sup>61</sup>Stephen Turnbull, *The Samurai: A Military History* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1977), 15-44, 56-60, 84-94; George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 299-467; Woodbridge Bingham, Hilary Conroy, and Frank W. Ilke, *A History of Asia: Volume I to 1600* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964), 518-535.

<sup>62</sup>Charles O. Hucker, *China's Imperial Past* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975), 285; F. W. Mote, *Imperial China: 900-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) 458-481, 613-615; Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 442-488, 584.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE FIGHTING FORCES

No study of the Mongol Invasions of Japan would be complete without a thorough analysis of the fighting forces involved in the campaign. The Mongols have become renowned for having conquered the largest contiguous land empire in history (see figure 1). Naturally, their ability to conquer such a large empire was predicated upon their skill at arms and superb leadership, strategy, tactics, logistics, and adaptability. The Mongol ability to use archery and mass cavalry to great effect is particularly noteworthy.<sup>1</sup> Also of note is Mongol skill in using the sparse resources of their homeland to create a particularly effective logistical system for long campaigns.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the Mongol ability to organize their forces, adapt to their opponents, and incorporate new and useful elements of warfare from conquered people helped to establish their supremacy in battle. This chapter will provide a thorough look at the Mongol fighting forces and will describe some of their expertise, while also showing how they might not have been able to harness some of that proficiency against the Japanese. It will also describe those areas where the Japanese might have actually held an advantage. These factors would prove crucial to Japanese victory.



Figure 1. The Mongol Empire

Source: Robert Marshall, *Storm from the East* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 215.

Equally famed for their fighting prowess were the Mongols' adversaries: the samurai fighting class of Japan. Unlike the Mongol army, which was a force that relied on universal conscription (every eligible male served in the army), the Japanese samurai were an elite fighting force that devoted their entire lives to training for warfare.<sup>3</sup> The first school for warriors opened in Japan in 782 AD, and by 880 AD, the samurai had developed into truly professional warriors.<sup>4</sup> Much like the Mongols, the samurai were

famous for their skill at horsemanship and archery.<sup>5</sup> However, the samurai also employed a wide variety of long-reach hand-to-hand weapons and were skilled at close quarter combat.<sup>6</sup> In this respect, they enjoyed an advantage over the Mongols, who were not as skilled at fighting hand-to-hand, and did not have particularly good weapons for close-in combat.<sup>7</sup> The samurai also had a highly effective organization under their military government, which we will explore in depth, and overall better armor than the Mongols.<sup>8</sup> These advantages would help determine the outcome of the battles. This chapter will look first at the Mongols, and then the Japanese.

### Mongol Weapons and Armor

The composite bow was the signature weapon of the Mongol Army.<sup>9</sup> Mongol bows consist of wood, horn, and sinew, and had a maximum range to 300 meters.<sup>10</sup> It was significantly better than standard European crossbows of the time, which only had a maximum range of 75 meters, and was even better than the famed English longbow, which had a range of 220 meters.<sup>11</sup> The Mongols typically used a thumb ring to minimize strain on the pulling finger, allowing for a quicker release.<sup>12</sup> While the Mongol bow had a maximum range of up to 300 meters, in combat, the Mongol warrior typically fired at a range of less than 150 meters.<sup>13</sup> Arrows used were about two feet in length, made of willow wood and normally included a tempered, chiseled arrowhead for better armor penetration.<sup>14</sup> Arrowheads were made of iron, steel, horn, or bone.<sup>15</sup> Mongol warriors typically carried about 60 arrows in a quiver, and often had several extra quivers attached to their horses to ensure that they did not run out of ammunition.<sup>16</sup>

Despite their skill in archery, the Mongols were often inferior to their opponents in hand-to-hand fighting.<sup>17</sup> When they had to fight in close quarters, Mongol warriors

generally carried lances or light sabers.<sup>18</sup> As this thesis will explain, the Japanese had an advantage when it came to close combat weapons.

The Mongols generally preferred to wear lamellar armor over mail, as it provided better protection against arrows and was easier to manufacture than mail.<sup>19</sup> This armor consisted of lacquered strips of leather; heavy cavalry, however, did often wear overcoats of mail.<sup>20</sup> Their helmets were generally acorn-shaped and made out of bronze or iron, with flaps to protect the neck and ears.<sup>21</sup> Frequently, the Mongols left their backs unarmored, and in some cases, Mongol warriors wore a treated leather coat called a *deel* or *degel* rather than armor.<sup>22</sup> Japanese armor was generally better than Mongol armor, and this gave the Japanese an advantage.<sup>23</sup>

### Mongol Horsemanship

The effective use of light cavalry characterized Mongol Warfare.<sup>24</sup> Mongol warriors were raised in the saddle from early childhood and depended upon having an excellent supply of horses to ride into battle.<sup>25</sup> Each Mongol warrior took about five horses into battle, and changed horses frequently in order to keep them fresh.<sup>26</sup> In order to maintain a ready supply of battle horses, each Mongol male had a herd that averaged about thirty horses.<sup>27</sup> Chinese envoys reported that Mongol herds often numbered in the thousands.<sup>28</sup>

Mongol horses were generally smaller than those used in Europe and the Middle East at the time but were strong and had far better endurance than others had.<sup>29</sup> The vast steppes of Asia generally provided a large amount of pastureland, despite the harsh climate and conditions. A Chinese official remarked that pastureland was generally the sole source of nutrition for horses, and that the Mongols generally never fed their horses

grain, fodder, or beans.<sup>30</sup> Marco Polo remarked that the Mongols typically refused to let their horses graze while being ridden or changed on a campaign, however:

Their horses also will subsist entirely on the grass of the plains, so that there is no need to carry store of barley or straw or oats; and they are very docile to their riders. These, in case of need, will abide on horseback the livelong night, armed at all points, while the horse will be continually grazing.<sup>31</sup>

Mongol horses also had another major advantage over their rivals. They could forage in the snow, and naturally used their hooves to scrape away snow from the tundra to look for lichens, grass, and other food on the ground.<sup>32</sup> This provided a huge benefit, as it made it possible for the Mongols to campaign under extremely adverse conditions. In one well-known Mongol campaign, the Mongols were able to cross the Pamir Mountains (see figure 2) in the middle of winter, thanks to their rugged steeds.<sup>33</sup> So close was the relation of man to rider that many Mongols trained their horses to respond to whistles and other commands.<sup>34</sup> Mongol society held its horses in such high regard that Chinggis Khan actually forbade the killing of any horse that had been ridden in a battle.<sup>35</sup>

This reliance on grazing obviously carried a logistical advantage on long campaigns, as it eliminated the need for a large train to carry grain and fodder. However, this proved a limitation as well, as it made it difficult for the Mongols to campaign in any location (such as desert areas) where adequate pastureland did not exist.<sup>36</sup>

Mongol saddles were generally made of wood and had a high and front and back to allow the warrior to remain stable while discharging a bow with both hands.<sup>37</sup> The stirrups were generally placed low, balancing the rider's weight on the center rather than on the sides in order to allow the warrior to turn and shoot more easily.<sup>38</sup> The Mongols took great care in training their horses to be able to ride great distances, and generally did

not allow them to eat or drink until after the riding was done and they were calmed down.<sup>39</sup> On a typical day, a Mongol horse and rider could travel up to 15 kilometers, giving the Mongol army the ability to cover great distances in a relatively short amount of time.<sup>40</sup> The Mongols also developed a harness that allowed the warrior to control a horse while leaving the hands free for archery.<sup>41</sup>

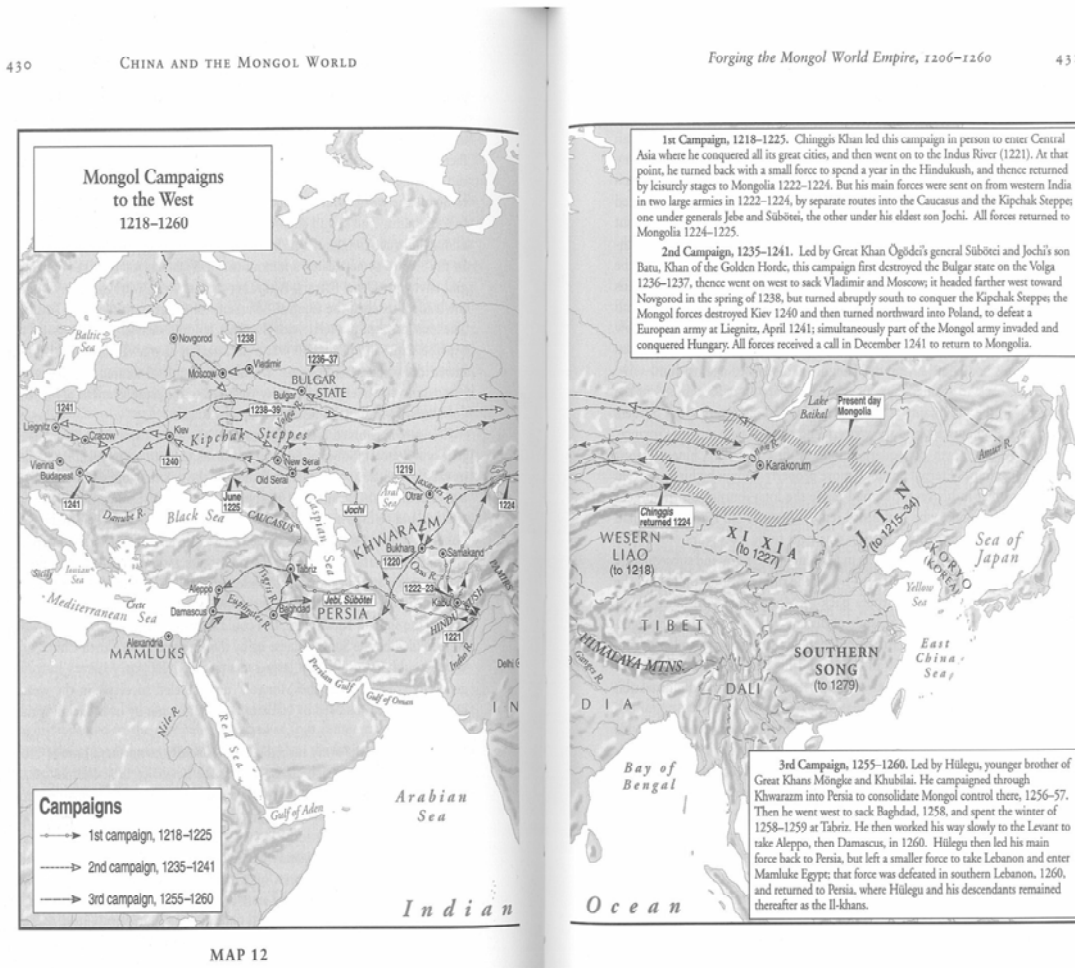


Figure 2. Map of Mongol Terrain (note Pamir Mountains and Steppe Areas)  
Source: F. W. Mote, *Imperial China: 900-1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 430-431.



## Mongol Battle Tactics

The Mongols used cavalry and archery as the basis for their battle tactics.<sup>42</sup> When the Mongols went on a campaign, they typically advanced in several separate columns, using horse couriers, signal whistles and flags, and lanterns to maintain communications between columns.<sup>43</sup> Frequently, they used several different avenues of approach.<sup>44</sup> This generally continued until the enemy was located. Once the enemy was located, the Mongols concentrated columns at a critical time and location, or struck in multiple directions. The Mongols followed the old axiom of marching divided and fighting united.<sup>45</sup>

Once the Mongols encountered their enemy, they employed hit and run tactics, showering their adversaries with arrows in a large mass in an effort to disrupt their formations.<sup>46</sup> Frequently, these hit and run tactics took the form of waves of cavalry sent out line by line that fired volleys of arrows up to a distance of 40-50 meters from the enemy, at which point the lines would then wheel about and move back to their lines.<sup>47</sup> This technique is very similar to the caracole tactics performed by European pistol cavalry in the 16th and 17th centuries.<sup>48</sup> Marco Polo commented on this tactic:

When they came to an engagement with the enemy, they will gain the victory in this fashion. [They never let themselves get into a regular melee, but keep perpetually riding around and shooting into the enemy. And] as they do not count it any shame to run away in battle, they will [sometimes pretend to] do so, and in running away they turn in the saddle and shoot hard and strong at the foe, and in this way make great havoc.<sup>49</sup>

If the enemy maintained its ranks, the Mongols continued attacking in this manner, constantly alternating fire and movement, often completely eroding the enemy's combat power.<sup>50</sup>

If, on the other hand, the enemy broke ranks and attempted to pursue the Mongols as they wheeled about, the Mongols might then attempt a feigned retreat.<sup>51</sup> As the enemy's structure unraveled, some of their forces aggressively pursued, picking off stragglers.<sup>52</sup> A feigned retreat such as this might very well continue for a great distance. Then, at a pre-determined location, heavy cavalry would sweep in and attack from the flanks, while the "retreating" cavalry would wheel around and attack the pursuing enemy from the front, resulting in envelopment.<sup>53</sup> Marco Polo also commented on how the Mongols used these feigned retreats to perfection:

Thus they fight to as good purpose in running away as if they stood and faced the enemy, because of the vast volleys of arrows that they shoot in this way, turning round upon their pursuers, who are fancying that they have won the battle. But when the Tartars see that they have killed and wounded a good many horses and men, they wheel round bodily, and return to the charge in perfect order and with loud cries; and in a very short time the enemy are routed.<sup>54</sup>

Sir Basil H. Liddell-Hart once remarked that this technique "is the first time in military history that 'fire' is employed systematically to pave way for the assault."<sup>55</sup>

At times, the Mongols might also use a standard sweep or *tulughama* technique.<sup>56</sup> This tactic was similar to a classic "double-envelopment." Heavy cavalry attacked from the front, while light cavalry would sweep around the enemy's flanks.<sup>57</sup> At other times, the Mongols might attempt a complete encirclement.<sup>58</sup> In this regard, they drew upon the *nerge* hunting technique, which involved using their horses to surround their prey.<sup>59</sup> To accomplish this, the Mongols might feign to the front, while using their cavalry to move around the enemy and launch a main attack from the rear. Often, they left a small hole in their ranks to make the enemy believe that it could escape. If the enemy took the bait, the Mongols surrounded them from all sides.<sup>60</sup> They used just such a strategy to defeat the Hungarians at Mohi in 1241.<sup>61</sup>

The Mongols ruthlessly pursued all retreating armies.<sup>62</sup> Sometimes, these pursuits continued for weeks until nearly all members of the enemy force were killed or captured.<sup>63</sup> Such pursuit was designed to prevent the enemy forces from re-forming and attacking again, and denied the surviving enemy any opportunity to attack the Mongol lines of supply and communication.<sup>64</sup> In 1299, as an example, the Mongols pursued the retreating Mamluks at Salaamiyet all the way to Gaza, a city located 300 miles from the battlefield itself.<sup>65</sup>

Early on, the Mongols also developed the ability to conduct siege warfare in order to defeat their enemies in cities and fortresses.<sup>66</sup> They learned most of these techniques from conquered peoples, and developed their own engineer corps.<sup>67</sup> The Mongols often used Chinese experts to assist them in siege operations, and their siege engines included light and heavy catapults for launching missiles, ballistae-like giant crossbows, trebuchets, fireworks, and explosive pots filled with sulphur, nitre, aconite, oil charcoal, resin and wax fired by catapults.<sup>68</sup> Archaeological evidence indicates that the Mongols did indeed use explosives during their invasions of Japan.

The Mongols also developed one particularly cruel siege technique. This involved the taking of enemy prisoners, and in turn forcing them to either work in siege operations, or advance in front of Mongol troops during the storming of a city.<sup>69</sup> Enemy forces showed reluctance to attack members of their own community. If nothing else, the captives served as human shields to protect the Mongol force.<sup>70</sup>

The Mongols often used deception and other types of psychological warfare in order to gain an edge against their opponents.<sup>71</sup> One technique was to use extra horses with dummy riders, in order to deceive the enemy as to the true size of the Mongol

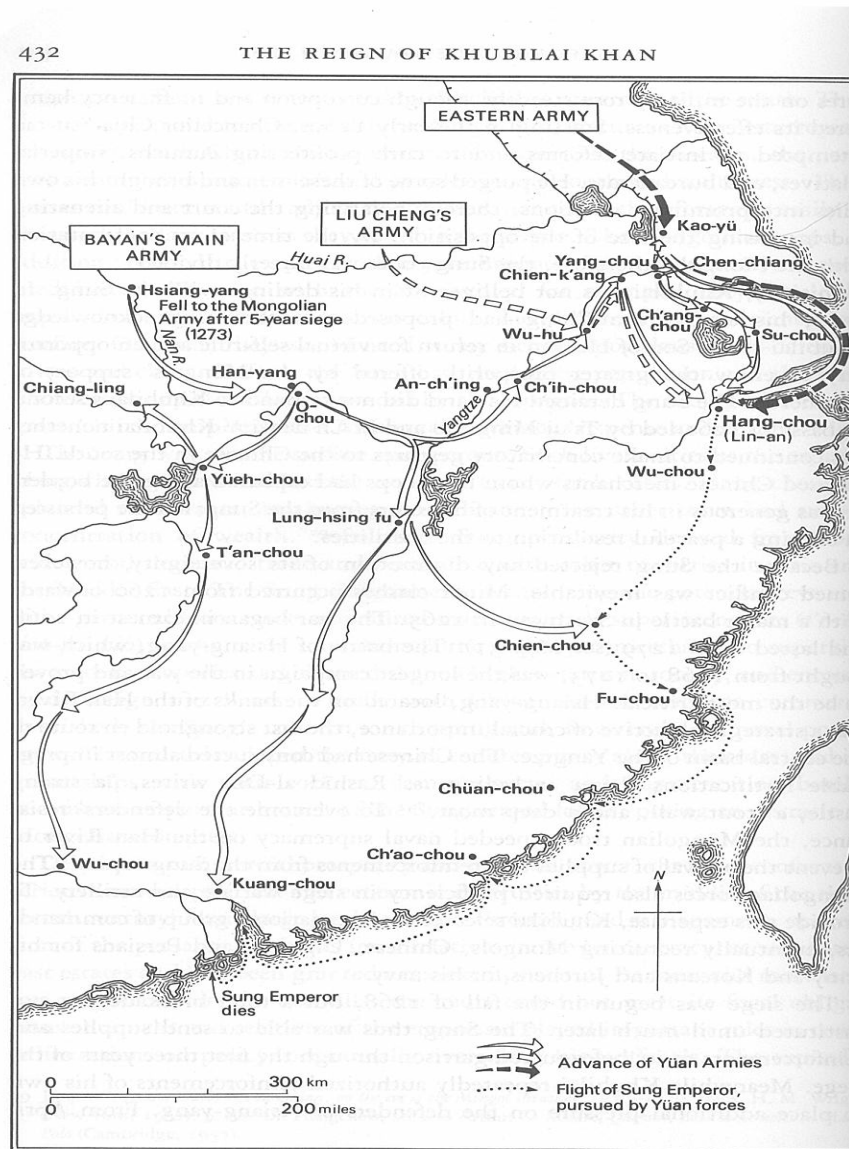
force.<sup>72</sup> At other times, the Mongols might light several false campfires in order to deceive the enemy as to the location of their true encampment.<sup>73</sup> The Mongols were even known for herding cattle and other livestock into enemy lines in order to disrupt their ranks.<sup>74</sup> Finally, the Mongols sometimes interrupted periods of deliberate silence with hideous yells and screams during a main attack in an effort to frighten the enemy.<sup>75</sup> During the Japanese invasions, the Mongols attempted to use various psychological warfare techniques, which later chapters will describe in detail.

While the Mongols were not chiefly seafarers, they did learn seafaring tactics and used them effectively in defeating the Chinese Sung dynasty.<sup>76</sup> So remarkable was the Mongol ability to adapt to fighting aboard ships that one Chinese naval historian wrote: “the alacrity with which the Mongols, a nation of horsemen unacquainted with the sea, took to naval warfare was amazing.”<sup>77</sup> In preparation for their campaign against the Sung, the Mongols used Koreans and Chinese to build vessels, a technique that they later used during the invasions of Japan; the Mongols also used captured enemy ships.<sup>78</sup> This use of allied capabilities also helps illustrate the extent to which the Mongols were able to use subjugated people to assist their operations, something that became important in their Japanese campaigns.

To defeat the Sung, the Mongols first conducted a naval blockade of Hsiangyang.<sup>79</sup> The city finally fell after a five-year siege.<sup>80</sup> The Mongols then completed their conquest of the Sung Empire by sailing a fleet down the Yangtze River. During the campaign, the Mongols made extensive use of artillery fired from the vessels against enemy cities.<sup>81</sup> The Mongols captured numerous Sung strongholds in route to their final

victory, culminating with the capture of the Sung capital at Hang-chou (see figure 3).<sup>82</sup>

The Mongols undoubtedly learned many naval lessons during this campaign.



MAP 31. The conquest of Southern Sung

Figure 3. Southern Sung Campaign

Source: Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 6: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 432.

### Mongol Intelligence and Espionage

The Mongols gathered intelligence by several different methods. First, they created a postal system called the *yam* using horses and riders that relayed information between the Khan and his generals over great distances.<sup>83</sup> Second, they often sent raiding parties in advance of their main body, which included a force of scouts that rode back to provide information on the enemy.<sup>84</sup> Finally, the Mongols sometimes used expeditionary forces to gather information on enemy geography, politics, and military strength.<sup>85</sup> It is important to note, however, that all of these methods depended upon the ability to operate their horse-centered forces over large distances. Because Japan was an island nation, it was likely much more difficult than normal for the Mongols to conduct their normal intelligence gathering operations prior to the invasion.

### Mongol Organization and Command and Control (C2)

Since the time of Chinggis Khan, Mongol armies were organized along decimal lines.<sup>86</sup> The basic unit of the Mongol Army was the *tumen* (or division) which consisted of 10,000 fighting men.<sup>87</sup> Each *tumen* rode as a single mass. The *tumen* was then further broken down into ten sub-units of 1,000 troops known as *minghan*, (or regiments)<sup>88</sup>, then into groups of 100 called *jagan*, (or squads), and finally into *arban*, (or troops), of 10.<sup>89</sup> However, *tumens* were often at less than full strength, so during Khubilai Khan's time, a rating system was devised to describe the strength of the *tumens*. *Tumens* with a strength of 7,000 or more troops were graded as "upper," those with 5-7,000 as "middle," and those down to a minimum of 3,000 were graded "lower."<sup>90</sup> Typically, two or more *tumens* made up a Mongol field army. The field army rank of *orlok*, (literally "eagle," equivalent to field marshal) was created to lead it.<sup>91</sup> Commanders were usually promoted

due to their battle reputations, and troops typically remained in the same units throughout their careers in order to foster cohesiveness.<sup>92</sup>

Mongol field armies also had a sort of general staff that assisted the Commander. There was no equivalent to the modern G1 section. Accountability was ordinarily the responsibility of subordinate commanders.<sup>93</sup> The intelligence, or G2 function, was given to four men with the titles of “far and near arrows” that controlled scouts, messengers, and couriers.<sup>94</sup> The G3 function, or operations, was also non-existent. It appears that it was a commander’s responsibility.<sup>95</sup> Logistics functions were broken down into several different people. Four men oversaw weapons and arrows, three mess and feeding, and additional staff officers maintained horses, sheep, pastures, and carts.<sup>96</sup> Finally, a “Chief Engineer” was responsible for coordinating siege warfare.<sup>97</sup> The overseer of carts likely also served as both the G4 and Chief of Staff.<sup>98</sup>

In addition to these tumens and staff, a handpicked imperial guard known as the *keshik* also existed.<sup>99</sup> By the time of Khubilai Khan, it numbered over 12,000 men. These soldiers not only served as the Khan’s own guard force but also assisted in running palace affairs.<sup>100</sup> In 1263, Khubilai Khan created a privy council to oversee military affairs.<sup>101</sup> He designated those Mongol troops under his direct control as *Meng-ku chun* (or Mongol Army), those not directly under his control as *tammachi*, and a third group, consisting of ethnic Chinese infantrymen. Khubilai Khan’s force during the second invasion of Japan consisted primarily of conscripted Chinese. This had important effects.

#### Mongol Recruiting, Funding, and Logistics

For the Mongol Empire, recruiting personnel for the Army was a simple process. All men aged 15-70 were considered automatically eligible for military service.<sup>102</sup> From

1234 onward, the Mongol Empire implemented widespread population registration, resulting in large numbers of soldiers drafted from throughout the empire.<sup>103</sup> At first, soldiers received only booty as pay, as military service was considered to be so intrinsically a part of Mongol life that it was not regarded as a job.<sup>104</sup> This slowly changed, however, as the empire grew. Eventually, Chinese and other non-Mongol soldiers received salaries, and other Mongol forces were allocated land and produce.<sup>105</sup>

The Mongols developed an efficient system for sustaining a large army. In many respects, their feeding system was intrinsic to their primary role as cavalry. As this thesis already mentioned, every Mongol warrior rode into battle with five or more horses. Perhaps because of this, mare's milk became the basic ration. Two mares could support one soldier with nearly half of his protein and caloric requirements for up to a five-month lactation period.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, because mare's milk did not curdle, it was also sometimes dried into a paste and carried by the soldier in a leather bag. It could then be easily mixed with water, and served as an effective field ration for long campaigns.<sup>107</sup> Fermented mare's milk or *kumiss* was a popular alcoholic beverage.<sup>108</sup> In addition to mare's milk, the Mongols generally carried millet in their wagon trains and marched with various herd animals, which they ate, together with horsemeat, for added protein and calories.<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting Mongol custom was their special type of emergency ration. Sometimes, a Mongol warrior in the need of sustenance would simply cut a vein on the neck of one of his horses, and drink the blood.<sup>110</sup> Each horse could provide up to 14 pints of blood without suffering ill effects.<sup>111</sup> A Mongol warrior with eight horses could very well sustain himself for up to six days on a straight diet of mare's blood as an emergency food source.<sup>112</sup> As one can plainly see, the Mongols had a highly efficient



logistics structure that allowed a relatively light supply train to keep the Army supported over vast distances. Unfortunately, the invasions of Japan provided unique challenges, given that it was a seaborne invasion overseas, and required a different approach to logistics.

Naturally, the raising, provisioning, and paying of such a large military force required money, and the Mongol Empire eventually developed an extensive taxation system. Khubilai Khan monopolized all bamboo production to increase weapons stores.<sup>113</sup> Obviously, horses were a vital strategic resource for the great Khan, and the Mongol government decreed that Mongol citizens donate one out of every one hundred horses throughout the empire. The state also maintained an absolute right to purchase any additional horses it needed, sometimes, without compensation to the owners.<sup>114</sup> Marco Polo, during his visits to Mongol China, wrote that Khubilai Khan also authorized extensive hunting parties throughout the empire to provide a constant supply of game meat.<sup>115</sup> It is also important to note that Khubilai Khan's empire made extensive use of paper money. Marco Polo observed this currency in use throughout the empire.<sup>116</sup>

Despite this efficient taxation system, the preparations for the invasions of Japan were extremely costly. As this thesis will describe in subsequent chapters, the financing of the campaigns in China would prove to be detrimental to Khubilai Khan's empire. Khubilai's treasury was largely squandered, and the costly financial outlays associated with building ships for the invasions created revenue problems that were to anger Khubilai's Chinese subjects.<sup>117</sup>

### Khubilai Khan: Mongol Leader

No description of the Mongol fighting forces would be complete unless it provided some background on the Mongol Emperor, Khubilai Khan. Khubilai was born on September 23, 1215. The grandson of famed Mongol conqueror Chinggis Khan, his Father Tolui had been passed over for selection as Chinggis Khan's successor.<sup>118</sup> However, his mother, Sorghagtani had high hopes for Khubilai, and set about obtaining for him control over a section of Northern China.<sup>119</sup> Khubilai Khan set about ruling these domains, using primarily Chinese advisors.<sup>120</sup> Although Khubilai could read Mongol Uighur script, he never learned to read Chinese and generally relied on his Chinese advisors to translate for him.<sup>121</sup>

In 1253, under Khan Mongke's direction, Khubilai began a campaign against the Chinese at Ta-li. This campaign increased his power and prestige and resulted in Khubilai's election as Great Khan in 1260.<sup>122</sup> Khubilai then set out to create a court with Chinese advisors, as well as other advisors from throughout the Empire, while maintaining strict segregation of his Mongol and Chinese subjects.<sup>123</sup> Eventually, in 1279, Khubilai succeeded in conquering all of China, and proclaimed a new Chinese imperial dynasty, the Yuan. During his reign, Khubilai became widely renowned as a patron of the arts, and some Chinese historians later remembered him as a great ruler.<sup>124</sup> Khubilai Khan's legacy might have been even better had he focused solely on ruling, and less on conquering.<sup>125</sup> Unfortunately, his reputation suffered due to his attempts at conquest, beginning with his unsuccessful attempts to invade Japan.<sup>126</sup>

The Mongols obviously possessed a very powerful and efficient war machine, and thanks to their conquest of China also acquired an advanced civilization and naval power.

However, their Japanese samurai adversaries also possessed an extremely advanced martial society, one that would prove to be more than a match for their Mongol invaders.

### The Japanese Samurai, His Weapons, and Equipment

Like the Mongols, the Japanese samurai relied on mounted archery as the foundation of their military tactics and strategy.<sup>127</sup> The development of Japanese archery begins during the 12th century in the Kamakura Period.<sup>128</sup> Samurai bows, like those used elsewhere in Asia, were primarily of the composite type.<sup>129</sup> However, unlike most bows, the Japanese bow had a handgrip located about one-third of the way up the bow, rather than in the middle. This was designed to make the bow easier to discharge while riding at a full gallop.<sup>130</sup> As the Japanese samurai were primarily mounted archers, they devoted considerable time to mounted target practice.<sup>131</sup> The samurai employed a wide variety of different arrowheads. One kind, shaped like a “V” was designed to cut cords in enemy armor. Another kind was perforated and designed to create a whistling sound when fired, in order to intimidate the enemy.<sup>132</sup> During the Mongol Invasions, Japanese archery skill proved to be a decisive factor in Japanese victory.<sup>133</sup>

Besides the bow and arrow, the samurai also employed a wide a variety of other weapons, including the famous samurai sword, and a type of glave/halberd called a *naginata*.<sup>134</sup> Unlike the Mongols, the Japanese were equally adept at fighting mounted and dismounted combat, thanks in no small part to the weapons that they employed.<sup>135</sup> The naginata is a uniquely Japanese weapon.<sup>136</sup> It consisted of a curved sword blade attached to a long pole and was equally effective against mounted and dismounted opponents.<sup>137</sup> Although it was heavy and sometimes difficult to wield in wooded areas, its length and weight made it especially effective when used by foot soldiers to slash and

stab at cavalry.<sup>138</sup> This made it the preferred weapon for samurai infantrymen over the spear.<sup>139</sup> Thrusts and slashes primarily aimed at weak points in the enemy armor, especially the legs of both horses and men.<sup>140</sup> It is for this reason that Japanese armor generally included leg protection.<sup>141</sup>

The curved Japanese samurai sword, or *tachi*, is well known. Most soldiers wore it suspended from a belt with the cutting edge down.<sup>142</sup> By the 11th century, it had reached the form known today and was deadly as a cutting weapon.<sup>143</sup> Together with the naginata, it likely would have provided an advantage over the Mongols in dismounted combat.

Japanese samurai armor, known as *yoroi*, was of the lamellar variety.<sup>144</sup> The armor consisted of lacquered scales fastened together in strips to create a flexible plate.<sup>145</sup> The armor was box-like in application, with a one-piece breastplate, and large heavy shoulder plates attached with cords.<sup>146</sup> In most depictions, the armor also had plates that draped over the thighs in skirt-like fashion. The breastplate was specially designed to allow for a smooth passage of a pulled bowstring.<sup>147</sup> The left arm had an arm sleeve, whereas the right arm was kept free to make it easier to draw a bow.<sup>148</sup> The lower legs were protected with three large plates wrapped around the shins.<sup>149</sup>

Samurai wore heavy iron helmets with a curved neckpiece.<sup>150</sup> Some samurai also wore an iron face guard.<sup>151</sup> On occasion, samurai were also known to carry large wooden shields. However, when they did, they were heavy and cumbersome, and were used primarily for protection against arrows and not for hand-to-hand combat.<sup>152</sup> Figure 4 is a good depiction of a Japanese samurai with his full armor and naginata (see figure 4). The

Japanese weapons and armor helped to make them a formidable fighting force, one that would be more than a match for their Mongol adversaries.



Figure 4. Samurai Figurine

Source: Stephen Turnbull, *The Samurai: A Military History* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing, 1977), 45.

### Samurai Training, Organization, and Ethos

The formal training of warriors in Japan began with the establishment of Japan's first military training school in 782 ACE.<sup>153</sup> Between 850 and 880, schools devoted to the training of fully professional soldiers appeared. At these *ryu*, or *ryuha*, as these military schools came to be known, aspiring warriors learned horsemanship, strategy and tactics, archery, and the use of weapons such as the naginata.<sup>154</sup> Initially, these warriors, later known as *samurai*, worked for an aristocratic dynastic ruling class.<sup>155</sup> As time went on, however, a new system of military government, and a new warrior ethos formed around these highly trained warriors.<sup>156</sup>

In the 1100s, a warrior code that would later be called *bushido* was firmly established in Japan.<sup>157</sup> Around that time, Japan's first shogun, Yoritomo Minamoto began his ascent to power. A key to his rise to power, a strong sense of loyalty and pristine values developed between Yoritomo and his vassals.<sup>158</sup> This code evolved into bushido. In 1192, after an extensive campaign, Yoritomo succeeded in eliminating the last of his military opposition, and the Japanese Emperor based in Kyoto appointed him the *shogun*, or military ruler of all Japan, at his encampment or *bakufu* at Kamakura (see figure 5). This marked the beginning of a purely feudal society in Japan, ruled by the military.<sup>159</sup>



Figure 5. Map of Japan Showing Kamakura and Kyoto

Source: Woodridge Bingham, Hilary Conroy, and Frank. W. Ikle, *A History of Asia: Volume I* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964), 523.

Under bushido, a strong sense of loyalty existed between a lord and his vassal retainers, or samurai.<sup>160</sup> The warrior was expected to obey his lord without question, and without regard to his own personal safety or interests.<sup>161</sup> The warrior was likewise expected to show no regrets in taking life, and was expected to give his own life for his

lord as required.<sup>162</sup> One early statement of the samurai's willingness to die for his lord can be found in the *Mutsu Waki*, which describes a response of wounded soldiers to a Lord's compassion:

We shall give our bodies to pay our debt. For our own leader's sake, we shall perish without regret.<sup>163</sup>

A good example of the life-taking ethos that was expected of every samurai can be found in the chronicle of a warrior named Kumagae Naozane:

A man born in a house of warriors and brought up to bear arms must not feel grief at taking life. It is the duty of a warrior always to bear the fact of death in mind.<sup>164</sup>

Eventually, the military elite earned the privilege of being able to take the lives of commoners at will.<sup>165</sup> There can be little doubt that such a strictly disciplined, martial society provided some advantages, not the least of which would include the capacity to develop a fighting force capable of resisting the world's largest empire.<sup>166</sup>

In addition to purely feudal, landowning arrangements, samurai lords often appointed vassals to various administrative offices from which the vassal extracted income from the land, while ownership of the land itself remained vested in the lord.<sup>167</sup> This arrangement allowed the shogun to retain a large degree of centralized control over the administration of the islands.<sup>168</sup> As an extension of this principle, the shogun and his vassals might also be appointed as stewards and given administrative control over lands still owned by the emperor in Kyoto and his aristocracy.<sup>169</sup> This made it possible for the shogun to rule in the emperor's name while at the same time maintaining unified control over the country and its military assets.<sup>170</sup> The location of the shogun's bakufu at Kamakura, away from the imperial court at Kyoto, enabled the shogun to keep his own samurai battle-ready, and free from the softness that life at the court might create.<sup>171</sup>



Such a structure facilitated the organization of military assets in time of need, and streamline administrative processes.

The net effect of this organization was to create, at the time of the Mongol Invasions, a government with centralized military control, garrisoned by a disciplined army of elite warriors devoted to constantly improving their military prowess and martial readiness.<sup>172</sup> It was a structure that proved highly effective in organizing resistance to the Mongol invaders.

### The Samurai System of Rewards

The bakufu at Kamakura had an extensive system for rewarding samurai that performed well in battle.<sup>173</sup> This is important for more than one reason. For one thing, it shows the high level of sophistication that the Japanese military government had developed, and helps scholars to understand why the Japanese were able to successfully resist.<sup>174</sup> Furthermore, the records left behind by the samurai involved in the rewards process provide a detailed documentary record of the invasions.<sup>175</sup> This makes them indispensable to historians.

The rewards system in large measure helped the samurai leaders keep their young warriors in line. The instructions of the shogun Hojo Shigetoki in the mid-1200s provide very specific guidance on the rewards system, as well as guidance on other aspects of leadership, and explain how a fair rewards system might be of use to the Commander:

In dealing with subordinates, do not make an obvious distinction between good and not good. Use the same kind of language, give the same kind of treatment to all, and thus you will get the best out of the worst. But you yourself must not lose sight of the distinction between good and bad character, between capable and incapable. You must be fair, but in practice you must not forget the difference between men who are useful and men who are not. Remember that the key to discipline is fair treatment in rewards and punishments.<sup>176</sup>

In order to receive rewards, a samurai had to go before his lord and provide tangible evidence of their battle service. In some cases, this might involve the presentation of severed heads.<sup>177</sup> In other cases, a warrior might write down a list of his accomplishments, and present the list to his lord. At that time, the lord might request strangers to come and testify on the warrior's behalf (the testimony of close friends or relatives was considered unreliable).<sup>178</sup> The system was to prove both advantageous and disadvantageous. On the one hand, it probably did help to keep soldiers motivated and focused on the mission. On the other hand, the payment of rewards would ultimately prove detrimental to the Kamakura government.

### Samurai Fortifications and Defense

Early in their history, the samurai became skilled at fighting behind defensive fortifications. In the 1180 Gempei War, the Minamoto and Taira clans fought many battles in which opposing forces fought behind barriers of wooden shields and fallen trees.<sup>179</sup> Later, at the battle of Huichi-Jo, samurai under Yoshinaka Minamoto fought out of a strong mountain position that included a stockade reinforced with earthworks and rocks, as well as a moat and crags.<sup>180</sup> In addition to those examples, there were throughout Japan a number of ancient fortifications and castles, some dating back more than six centuries that samurai routinely garrisoned.<sup>181</sup> This experience in both building fortifications and fighting behind them proved valuable. During both of the Mongol Invasions, the Japanese used their defensive positions to great advantage in defeating their Mongol enemy.

### Hojo Tokimune: Shogun and Japanese Leader

The Mongol Invasions provided a unique opportunity for a new leader to rise and unite the forces of Japan, Shogun Hojo Tokimune. In 1268, Shogun Hojo Masamura retired from office to become the bakufu Chief of Staff.<sup>182</sup> An eighteen year old samurai named Hojo Tokimune replaced him. Tokimune proved to be exactly the kind of leader that Japan needed in order to unite its forces and spearhead the defense of the nation.<sup>183</sup> At almost the exact time of his ascendancy, the first letter from Mongol Emperor Khubilai Khan would arrive at the court of the Japanese Emperor, a message that threw the Imperial Court into panic.<sup>184</sup>

Had the Imperial Court still ruled Japan, the response of the Japanese to this letter might have been very different.<sup>185</sup> However, the Japanese were fortunate to have a military government in place. This ensured that warriors, rather than courtiers, provided the response.<sup>186</sup> Tokimune immediately implored the samurai to put aside all internal disputes, and to unite behind the defense of the homeland.<sup>187</sup> For all the military prowess of the Mongol Empire, the Japanese samurai warrior class and its military government would show themselves to be more than capable of meeting the challenge of their invaders. The Mongols would underestimate the ability of their Japanese adversaries to resist and would make various mistakes that would ultimately result in the failure of their mission.

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<sup>1</sup>Timothy May, *The Mongol Art of War* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2007), 42-44.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 58-64.

<sup>3</sup>Mark Winchester, *The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (UK: Belgarun Limited, 2008), 15; and May, 2007, 45.

<sup>4</sup>Winchester, 15.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>May, 52.

<sup>8</sup>Winchester, 32.

<sup>9</sup>May, 50.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 51-52.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>20</sup>Richard A. Gabriel, *Subotai the Valiant: Genghis Khan's Greatest General* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 31.

<sup>21</sup>May, 53.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Winchester, 32.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>25</sup>May, 43, 54-55.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

- <sup>28</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., 55.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup>Gabriel, 36.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup>May, 56.
- <sup>37</sup>Ibid., 57.
- <sup>38</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., 56.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup>Winchester, 20.
- <sup>42</sup>May, 71.
- <sup>43</sup>Gabriel, 43.
- <sup>44</sup>May, 83.
- <sup>45</sup>Gabriel, 43.
- <sup>46</sup>May, 71.
- <sup>47</sup>Ibid., 72-73.
- <sup>48</sup>Ibid., 73.
- <sup>49</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup>Gabriel, 44.
- <sup>51</sup>Winchester, 20.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>May, 74.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>55</sup>Gabriel, 44.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>May, 76-77.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 77.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Gabriel, 45.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>May, 77-78.

<sup>67</sup>Winchester, 21.

<sup>68</sup>Gabriel, 46.

<sup>69</sup>David Morgan, *The Mongols* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publisher, 1986), 91.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 80-81.

<sup>75</sup>Gabriel, 45.

- <sup>76</sup>Winchester, 11-12.
- <sup>77</sup>Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 82.
- <sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 81-82.
- <sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 83-84.
- <sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 86.
- <sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 89. Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 6: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 432.
- <sup>83</sup>May, 69-70.
- <sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 70.
- <sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.
- <sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.
- <sup>87</sup>Morgan, 89. One interesting piece of trivia is that the Persian-speaking, Asiatic-looking Hazara ethnic group of Afghanistan actually owes its ethnic name to this organizational structure. The name “Hazara” means “one thousand” in Persian, and is a reference to their ancestors’ role as a unit in the Mongol Army.
- <sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>89</sup>Richard D. McCreight, “The Mongol Warrior Epic: Masters of Thirteenth Century Maneuver Warfare” (MMAS Thesis, Command and General Staff College, 1983), 34.
- <sup>90</sup>Thomas T. Allsen, *Mongol Imperialism: The Policies of the Grand Qan Mongke in China, Russia, and the Islamic Lands, 1251-1259* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 193.
- <sup>91</sup>Gabriel, 27-28.
- <sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 28.
- <sup>93</sup>McCreight, 38.
- <sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 38-39.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 40-42.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 43. Please note that the “G’s” used here refer to the modern day sections within an Army General Staff. The G1 section is responsible for personnel management and accountability. The G2 section is responsible for intelligence. The G3 section is responsible for operations and training. The G4 section is responsible for logistics.

<sup>99</sup>May, 31.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>101</sup>Morgan, 127.

<sup>102</sup>May, 30.

<sup>103</sup>Allsen, 117; and May, 30.

<sup>104</sup>Morgan, 90.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>106</sup>May, 60.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Rossabi, 128.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>115</sup>Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo* (Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Edition Limited 1997), 114-115.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 123.



- <sup>117</sup>Rossabi, 212.
- <sup>118</sup>Ibid., 14.
- <sup>119</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>120</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>121</sup>Ibid., 16.
- <sup>122</sup>Ibid., 53.
- <sup>123</sup>J. J Saunders, *The History of the Mongol Conquests* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 124.
- <sup>124</sup>Michael Prawdin, *The Mongol Empire: Its Rise and Legacy* (New York, NY: the MacMillan Company, 1940), 331.
- <sup>125</sup>Robert Marshall, *Storm From the East* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 220.
- <sup>126</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>127</sup>Winchester, 27.
- <sup>128</sup>Ibid., 28.
- <sup>129</sup>Stephen Turnbull, *The Samurai: A Military History* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1977), 19.
- <sup>130</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>131</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>132</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>133</sup>Winchester, 28.
- <sup>134</sup>Ibid., 19.
- <sup>135</sup>Ibid., 27.
- <sup>136</sup>Ibid., 30.
- <sup>137</sup>Ibid., 31.
- <sup>138</sup>Ibid.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid.

<sup>142</sup>Turnbull, 19.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 17-18.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid.

<sup>157</sup>George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 360. The term “Bushido” to describe the samurai code of ethics and action was coined in 1905 according to CGSC faculty member David Hunter-Chester.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 358.

<sup>159</sup>Woodbridge Bingham, Hilary Conroy, and Frank W. Ilke, *A History of Asia: Volume I to 1600* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964), 518.

<sup>160</sup>Sansom, 360-361.

- <sup>161</sup> Ibid., 361.
- <sup>162</sup> Ibid., 360, 363.
- <sup>163</sup> Ibid., 360.
- <sup>164</sup> Ibid., 363.
- <sup>165</sup> Bingham, Conroy, and Ilke, 519.
- <sup>166</sup> Sansom, 361.
- <sup>167</sup> Mikiso Hane, *Pre-Modern Japan: A Historical Survey* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), 66.
- <sup>168</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>169</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>170</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>171</sup> Winchester, 15.
- <sup>172</sup> Ibid., 17.
- <sup>173</sup> Thomas D. Conlan, *In Little Need of Divine Intervention: Takezaki Suenaga's Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 259.
- <sup>174</sup> Ibid., 259.
- <sup>175</sup> Ibid., 259; and George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 366.
- <sup>176</sup> Sansom, 336.
- <sup>177</sup> Conlan, 260.
- <sup>178</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>179</sup> Turnbull, 48.
- <sup>180</sup> Ibid., 58.
- <sup>181</sup> Ibid., 91.
- <sup>182</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE FIRST INVASION (1274) AND AFTERMATH

#### Motivations for the Mongol Invasions

Before exploring the diplomatic activity that preceded the first Mongol Invasion of Japan, it is worthwhile to consider the strategic motivations of the Mongols. One theory holds that the Mongol motivations might have had something to do with the idea that Khubilai Khan needed to improve his stature among his Chinese subjects.<sup>1</sup> In the ninth century, Japan had largely cut its ties with China due to Chinese persecution of Buddhists.<sup>2</sup> According to this theory, a successful invasion of Japan that would have established a tributary relationship between the two countries would have done a lot to advance Khubilai Khan's prestige among the Chinese leadership elite, who had long been interested in bringing their isolated neighbor back into the fold.<sup>3</sup>

Another possible explanation may have something to do with Khubilai's Mongol background. According to this theory, as Khubilai Khan set about managing the affairs of his new empire, he became increasingly Chinese in his thinking and increasingly alienated from his conquering Mongol roots.<sup>4</sup> As this theory goes, Khubilai Khan may have viewed the opportunity of the overseas conquest of Japan as an easy way to fulfill his need to re-affirm this Mongol heritage.<sup>5</sup>

The prospect of riches and plunder might have also been a strong motivation.<sup>6</sup> This theory is plausible based upon what we know from the writings of Marco Polo. In his famous memoirs, Polo wrote the following passages, referencing Japan's purported wealth (likely an exaggeration), and how this wealth might have motivated Khubilai Khan to mount an invasion in order to obtain it:

Zipangu (Japan) is an island in the eastern ocean. . . . They (the Japanese) are independent of every foreign power, and governed by their own kings. . . . They have gold in the greatest abundance, its sources being inexhaustible. . . . Of so great a celebrity was the wealth of this island, that a desire was excited in the breast of the Grand Khubilai Khan, now reigning, to make the conquest of it, and annex it to his domains.<sup>7</sup>

The most likely explanation for the Mongol Invasions of Japan, however, is a simple desire for continued conquest. Khubilai probably considered Japan to be a natural vassal state, and may have regarded controlling it as an obligation.<sup>8</sup> The Mongol occupation of Japan would naturally remove a potential threat to the mainland from the islands of Japan, given that the nearest part of Japan is only about 100 miles from the Korean peninsula. The Mongol occupation of Korea likewise provided a logical staging base for any invasion of Japan.<sup>9</sup> While the prospect of wealth was obviously a factor, sources indicate that the Mongols generally viewed the accumulation of wealth as a consequence of conquest, and this made it necessary to consider the conquest of Japan.<sup>10</sup>

In all likelihood, Khubilai Khan had been bolstered by his previous military successes within his empire, and in South China, and this encouraged him to seek other territories, including Japan.<sup>11</sup> Although Khubilai would likely have attempted to conquer Japan at one time or another, he became particularly interested in such a conquest after a Korean traveler suggested it to him in 1265.<sup>12</sup> Khubilai Khan then immediately set out to subjugate the islands of Japan, first attempting to do so by diplomatic means, and later resorting to military methods.<sup>13</sup>

#### Early Diplomatic Efforts

Khubilai Khan decided that the use of negotiation was the preferred course of action in subjugating the Japanese. In 1266, he sent out his first group of emissaries to

Japan via Korea, then known as Koryu.<sup>14</sup> The Mongols had already conquered Korea in 1259 after a thirty-year struggle, and made the Korean king a vassal.<sup>15</sup> For this mission, Khubilai chose Hei-Ti, his Minister of War, and Yin-Hung, his Minister of Ceremonies.<sup>16</sup> The selection of these two individuals was undoubtedly a psychological tactic: the Ministry of Ceremonies would be concerned with the affairs of a vassal state, while the Ministry of War would ensure that if Japan did not negotiate, it would face the prospect of an invasion.<sup>17</sup>

The Koreans were not at all enthusiastic about serving as intermediaries for the Mongols.<sup>18</sup> The Koreans genuinely wanted peace with the Japanese, although, as a new Mongol vassal state, this proved impossible.<sup>19</sup> This is not to say that Korea and Japan never had any disputes. During the early 1200s, Korea had frequently suffered from coastal raids by Japanese pirates known as “wako.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, some Japanese freebooters took advantage of the Korean conflict with the Mongols by launching raids on the Korean coast.<sup>21</sup> However, the Japanese government at Kamakura decided, after hearing complaints from the Korean government, to have the pirates arrested and executed in 1227, and Japanese-Korean relations were peaceful ever since.<sup>22</sup> The King of Korea knew he risked the destruction of his own kingdom if he went to war with Japan, and did not happily welcome requests from Khubilai Khan to assist in Mongol efforts.<sup>23</sup>

Unpersuaded, Khubilai Khan pressed forward. He had the following letter sent to the King of Korea, demanding his acquiescence and assistance with the embassy:

We are aware that in the eastern sea there is a fertile island named Japan. The country is affirmed by some of your countrymen who reside here not to be far from your land, and the people to be good-natured and easily governed. And the

country is said to have formerly had a close intercourse both with China and your country. Why, then, should we not have friendship with her? We command you to assist our envoy in every way, so that our aim may be realized.<sup>24</sup>

The Koreans attempted to dissuade the Mongol embassy from departing with tales of rough seas and bad weather.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the mission continued as the emissaries proceeded to the port of Shoheng-ho, where they boarded an ambassadorial ship, and set sail.<sup>26</sup> The vessel quickly encountered rough weather, and, at the request of their Mongol guests, the Koreans decided to turn the ship back.<sup>27</sup>

Khubilai Khan, upon hearing that his mission had failed, was furious. He blamed the Korean King and sent yet another letter, this time, mentioning his suspicion that the King might secretly be aiding the Japanese:

How can I believe the report of your men? But it makes me doubt whether or not you have a secret understanding with Japan, for I have here a reliable man who has been to Japan and gives me very different information. I may observe that he who deceives loses credit, and I strictly command you to proceed with my business at all costs. King, the fulfillment of this charge from me is the only atonement for your crime!<sup>28</sup>

The King responded that it made more sense for Khubilai not to risk any of his own men, but rather to allow him to send some of his own Korean emissaries, who would deliver a message prepared by Khubilai.<sup>29</sup> Khubilai eventually agreed to this arrangement.

In 1268, the emissaries finally made it across the Tsushima Straits and presented Khubilai Khan's letter to the local Kamakura representative in Kyushu.<sup>30</sup> The letter read as follows:

We by the Grace and decree of Heaven, Emperor of Great Mongolia, present a letter to the King of Japan. We have pondered that from ancient times even the princes of small states have striven to cultivate friendly intercourse with those of adjoining territories. To how much greater extent have our ancestors, who have received the Middle Empire by the inscrutable decrees, become known in numerous far off foreign lands, all of whom have revered their power and majesty! When we first ascended the throne, many innocent people in Korea



were suffering from continuous war. Thereupon we put an end to the fighting, restored their territories, and liberated the captives both old and young. We beg that hereafter, you, O King, will establish friendly relations with us so that the sages may make the four seas their home. Is it reasonable to refuse intercourse with each other? It will lead to war, and who is there who likes such a state of things! Think of this, O King!

The letter caused widespread panic at the Imperial Court.<sup>31</sup> Many people at the court took great offense to the reference to the Emperor as a mere “king,” and moreover, referring to Japan as a “small state.”<sup>32</sup> The Emperor immediately forwarded the letter to the bakufu government at Kamakura and included a draft response which left open the possibility of a compromise, but which warned Khubilai about the divine nature of the Japanese emperor.<sup>33</sup> The Shogun had other plans though. He had the emissaries sent away without a response, and without even so much as an acknowledgment of receipt.<sup>34</sup> For the samurai culture of Japan, the idea of submission or compromise was unthinkable.<sup>35</sup> The Kamakura government immediately began making defensive preparations, and ordered vassals living in Kamakura to return to their lands and prepare for war.<sup>36</sup>

Khubilai was outraged at the Japanese rebuff of his emissaries.<sup>37</sup> He immediately ordered the Korean ambassador at his court to send an order to the Korean king stating that he now intended to invade Japan, and demanded that he support the effort by building 1,000 ships, providing 4,000 bags of rice, and providing 40,000 soldiers.<sup>38</sup> The King’s ambassador attempted to dissuade Khubilai, but was ultimately unsuccessful, and the King responded by gathering together carpenters and putting shipyards into action.<sup>39</sup> It was, of course, more or less a given that any invasion of Japan would require Korean naval assistance, as the Mongols were not known as seafarers.<sup>40</sup> Despite these preparations, Khubilai still held out hope that further diplomatic efforts might succeed.

In 1271, Khubilai prepared yet another diplomatic mission. This time, he sent his envoy Hei-Ti, a Korean official named Sin-Sa-Jun, and a security detail of about 70 soldiers.<sup>41</sup> The group landed at Tsushima Island, off of the Japanese coast. The arrival of the vessel alarmed the inhabitants, and their governor, Sono Sukekuni, hastily assembled a force to meet their landing party.<sup>42</sup> The Mongols returned to their vessel, and were briefly pursued out to sea by the Japanese. On their way back to Korea, the Mongols seized a Japanese fishing vessel and took two Japanese fishermen hostage.<sup>43</sup> The fishermen were taken to Khubilai Khan's court where, after a year of entertaining, they were sent back to Japan in August 1271 with a mission to convince the Japanese government to acquiesce.<sup>44</sup> The Japanese response was consistent with earlier efforts. The envoys were not allowed to speak to the government, and the two fishermen were thrown in prison.<sup>45</sup> Hojo Tokimune, consistent with earlier precedent, again declined to respond to the letter. Instead, he continued to prepare for the worst. In 1272, he ordered all of his subordinates in Kyushu's Western Defense Region to strengthen their defenses. He also ordered samurai from western and central provinces to move west and assist in the defense of the island.<sup>46</sup>

Still, Khubilai Khan persisted. In October 1272, he sent one last ambassador to Japan.<sup>47</sup> He landed at Imazu in October 1272, and proceeded directly to Japan's Dazaifu Defense Headquarters.<sup>48</sup> He asked for a meeting with the Japanese sovereign and ordered that his letter be sent to the Court with a tight response deadline.<sup>49</sup> The letter was very threatening and stated "Should the reply not be given before November 5th of this year, my invincible army will at once invade Japan."<sup>50</sup> The Court declined to respond to

the letter, and ordered the Mongol ambassador expelled.<sup>51</sup> This was tantamount to a declaration of war.<sup>52</sup>

### Mongols Launch First Invasion Fleet

Despite these diplomatic efforts, Khubilai Khan more or less made up his mind to invade Japan after the failure of the 1268 mission, and began making preparations.<sup>53</sup> After a year's delay in order to ensure provisions via an increased rice crop, by mid-1274, the invasion force was ready.<sup>54</sup> The force consisted of 15,000 Mongol warriors under the command of Hol-Ton, Hung-Tsa-Kiu, and Yu-Pok-Hyong.<sup>55</sup> The force also included an additional 8,000 Korean troops, and about 7,000 Korean sailors.<sup>56</sup> The force departed from the Korean port of Haplo (near modern day Pusan) on a fleet of 900 vessels in October 1274. Mongol Prince Khaidu served as overall Commander, assisted by Korean Commander-General Kim Pang-gyong, and Mongol Marshalls Hong Ta-gu and Liu Fu-Hsiang.<sup>57</sup>

The Mongol plan was to seize the strait islands of Tsushima and Iki, and then proceed to Hakata Bay on the island of Kyushu for a landing. The islands might serve as supply and communication depots.<sup>58</sup> The choice of Hakata Bay as a landing site made sense for several reasons. Hakata Bay provided the largest harbor in western Japan and was the only location where a fleet of that size could dock in its entirety.<sup>59</sup> There was no other good port even remotely nearby (see figure 6).<sup>60</sup>

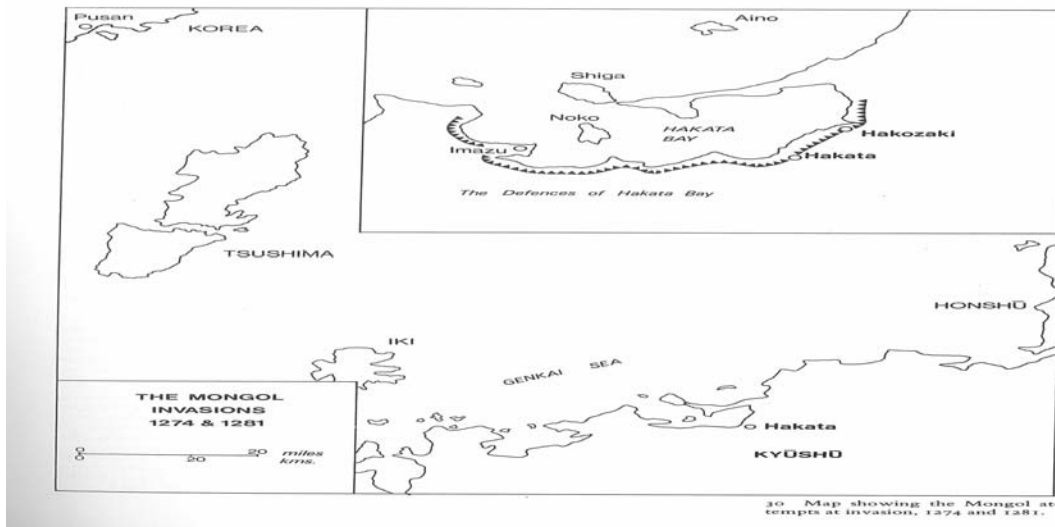


Figure 6. Map of Hakata Bay

Source: Stephen Turnbull, *The Samurai: A Military History* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing, 1977), 89.

One might wonder why the Mongols chose to land in Kyushu when the both the Imperial Japanese Court and the bakufu government were located on the main island of Honshu (in Kyoto and Kamakura respectively) (see figure 5). To completely conquer the islands and overthrow the Japanese government would have required the Mongols to not only subdue Kyushu, but moreover, to ferry their troops across the inland sea to the main island of Honshu, and then march overland.

The answer has to do with Mongol expectations. Frequently, when the Mongols invaded a territory, they would quickly win local allies.<sup>61</sup> Although this was not to be the case in Japan, the Mongols certainly had every reason to believe that it would, given that it had happened everywhere else.<sup>62</sup> In all likelihood, the Mongols expected that after they landed, there would be widespread defections to their side, and this would allow them to easily expand the size of their forces and conquer the islands.<sup>63</sup>

It is also worth noting that it may not have been necessary for the Mongols to completely conquer Japan, at least according to Mongol thinking.<sup>64</sup> For the Mongols, the mere Japanese recognition of the Great Khan's suzerainty would likely have been enough to make Japan a part of the empire.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps the Mongols believed that a show of force would be enough to compel the Japanese government to sue for peace and enable them to achieve victory.

In any event, the Mongol invasion force approached Tsushima Island on October 5, 1274. The island's garrison of about 8,000 included a mix of samurai and natives.<sup>66</sup> The island's governor, Sono Sukekuni, dispatched a small craft with a handful of samurai to make an inquiry of the approaching fleet. This boat was quickly showered with arrows, and returned to the shore.<sup>67</sup> The Mongol fleet landed at Sasunoura Bay, and advanced on both foot and on horseback across the strand, letting loose a large volume of arrows.<sup>68</sup> The island's forces quickly arrayed themselves along the strand, and attempted to engage the Mongols hand-to-hand. However, the Mongols' superior numbers and weapons, which included the use of poisoned arrow shafts, quickly overwhelmed the Japanese resistance.<sup>69</sup>

While advancing up the strand, the Mongols marshaled their forces in a sort of phalanx formation.<sup>70</sup> The Japanese, by contrast, rushed the Mongols as individual fighters, which was typically the custom in samurai challenges.<sup>71</sup> This, of course, proved ineffective, as the Mongols simply opened their ranks and enclosed any Japanese defender that managed to survive the arrow shower and get close enough to attack their phalanx.<sup>72</sup> By early evening, the Mongols had completely secured the coastline and advanced to the island's town, setting it on fire.<sup>73</sup> A final Japanese cavalry charge proved

unsuccessful, and the Mongols, after setting fire to the rest of the buildings on the island, headed back to their ships to prepare for an assault on the neighboring island of Iki.<sup>74</sup>

News of the Mongol attack on Tshushima sent the nearby island of Iki into an immediate panic.<sup>75</sup> The island's governor, Sayemonojo Kagetake, dispatched a messenger to Kyushu asking for reinforcements and hastily mobilized all of his forces.<sup>76</sup> A large number of civilians also volunteered to assist in the island's defense. Many of them were armed with little more than hunting spears and sticks.<sup>77</sup> The Mongol force landed on October 14th and quickly destroyed Japanese resistance on the beaches, killing large numbers of the mostly unprotected civilian volunteers.<sup>78</sup> Kagetake withdrew most of his soldiers to his island castle to make a stand.<sup>79</sup>

The Mongol forces arrived the next morning and began their assault on the fortress.<sup>80</sup> Japanese resistance was heroic. Kagetaki's warriors, fighting from parapets, succeeded in beating back wave after wave of Mongol attacks until the evening when the Mongol attackers succeeded in breaching the walls and setting fire to a part of the castle.<sup>81</sup> The Mongols then made use of an interesting psychological tactic. They took the captives captured in the earlier skirmishes, tied them together with ropes, and forced them to advance in front of the Mongols.<sup>82</sup> Kagetaki, desperately organizing his outnumbered force for one last stand against the Mongols, at first paused at the sight of these "human shields." One of the captives shouted for Kagetaki to shoot arrows into the wall in order to both cut them down, and the Mongols behind them. Kagetaki responded by ordering his troops to charge the wall and cut their way through.<sup>83</sup> The attack failed, and Kagetaki retreated to his quarters, where he and his family took their own lives.<sup>84</sup> Just as they had done on Tsushima, the Mongols set fire to the buildings on Iki.<sup>85</sup> Even

worse, they gathered up the bodies of the dead Japanese, stripped them, and nailed them to the sides of their vessels.<sup>86</sup> The Mongol fleet then departed for Hakata Bay, (see figure 7), their main objective on the Japanese main island of Kyushu.<sup>87</sup> It was to become the primary battleground during both invasions.

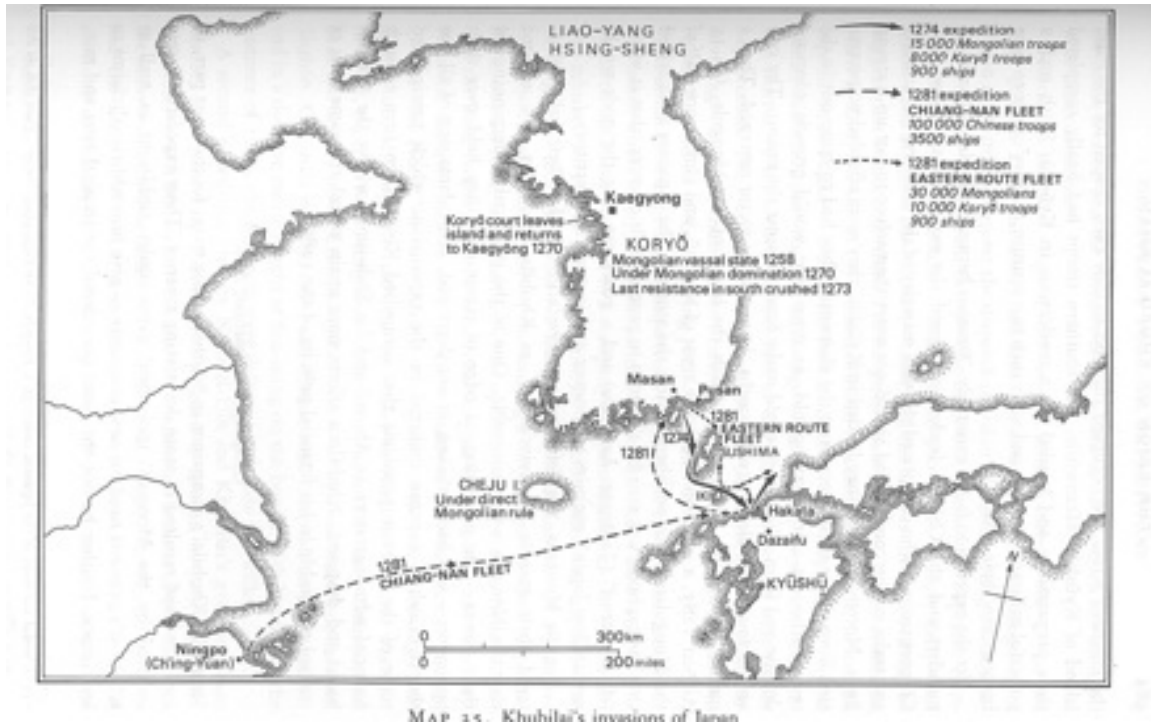


Figure 7. Map of Mongol Invasion Routes

Source: Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 6: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 432.

The Mongol fleet arrived near the Chikuzen Shore at Hakata Bay on October 19th, 1274.<sup>88</sup> At this point, the Japanese defense headquarters at Dazai-fu in southwestern Kyushu had already assembled all available samurai on the island to prepare for the defense.<sup>89</sup> Hojo Tokimune previously reconstructed several castles along

the bay together with bulwarks of up to 15 feet in height.<sup>90</sup> Upon sighting the Mongol fleet, the Japanese, rather than being terrified by the sight of the impaled bodies on the sides of the Mongol vessels, rallied bravely, moving quickly out of their fortifications to face the invaders.<sup>91</sup> The first encounter between the two forces took place at Hakata.<sup>92</sup> The number of Japanese samurai involved in this first invasion is widely disputed. Accounts vary from Thomas Conlan's estimate of a few thousand to David Winchester's estimate of 102,000.<sup>93</sup> These early skirmishes went poorly for the samurai. The Mongols fought in close formations, and their signal gongs and bells frightened the Japanese horses.<sup>94</sup> The Mongols also unleashed explosives at the Japanese, cutting down the samurai in large numbers.<sup>95</sup> Once again, the samurai were also hampered by the fact that their custom dictated single combat with the Mongols in order to collect heads and demonstrate bravery. This technique proved impractical against a well-coordinated enemy fighting in formation.<sup>96</sup>

At nearby Akasaka, the Mongols defeated a samurai force under Kikuchi Yasunari, and at Hyakudogahara, they defeated another Kamakura vassal, Shoni Kakue.<sup>97</sup> However, Kakue succeeded in causing heavy losses to the Mongols in fierce hand-to-hand fighting.<sup>98</sup> In addition, Kakue's son, an archery expert, succeeded in shooting Mongol Commander Liu Fu-Hsiang from his horse.<sup>99</sup> These actions substantially slowed the Mongol advance.<sup>100</sup> The Japanese forces then retreated into their fortifications.<sup>101</sup>

That night, the Japanese awaited reinforcements from the islands of Shikoku and Honshu, to whom word was sent following the Mongol arrival at Tsushima.<sup>102</sup> The ferocity of the Japanese resistance surprised the Mongols.<sup>103</sup> Their generals met that



evening, and differed on their next course of action. The wounded general favored waiting until the next morning before attempting to assault the fortifications.<sup>104</sup> Other Mongols leaders recommended a night attack, believing that they should attack before any Japanese reinforcements might have the opportunity to arrive.<sup>105</sup> However, the Mongols also faced a critical logistical problem; they had run short of arrows.<sup>106</sup> The Mongols expected that an initial blitzkrieg and arrow shower would be enough to subdue the defenders and were now faced with the possibility of making a night assault against fortified defenders whose arms were likely superior to theirs.<sup>107</sup> They finally decided to withdraw the vast majority of their forces that night to their ships.<sup>108</sup>

The night was not to be a pleasant one for the Mongols, however. As the Mongol forces rested, a large number of samurai from the Dazaifu sailed out in small craft in an effort to assault the Mongol fleet.<sup>109</sup> To carry out this task, they loaded about fifty small craft with hay, set the boats on fire, and pushed them out with the wind to burn the Mongol vessels.<sup>110</sup> While the Mongols panicked at the sight of the burning vessels, the samurai in their own vessels unleashed a large shower of arrows into the Mongol fleet and then boarded some of the intact Mongol vessels. These attacks on the Mongol fleet caused a large number of Mongol casualties.<sup>111</sup>

Shortly after that, the weather also became a problem for the Mongols. Strong winds blew and heavy rains ensued.<sup>112</sup> As the Mongol fleet attempted to leave the harbor, many ships were tossed on the waves, and at least one ran aground on Shiga spit.<sup>113</sup> The Japanese vessels largely managed to escape damage by sailing into inlets just before the worst of the storm arrived. By contrast, the Mongols lost as many as 200 vessels as they limped back to Korea.<sup>114</sup> Korean accounts state that the Mongol invasion

force may have lost as many as 13,000 men, including many from drowning.<sup>115</sup> This ended the first Mongol invasion of Japan. The Japanese credited their coastal fortifications for having stemmed the Mongol advance.<sup>116</sup> The Mongols, by contrast, largely blamed the defeat on insufficient manpower.<sup>117</sup>

### Japanese Reaction and Defensive Preparations

The Japanese, having escaped destruction, made extensive preparations to defend their nation in the eventuality of a second Mongol invasion. The preparations included the construction of new fortifications, streamlining their command and mobilization, and ending trade with Southern China.<sup>118</sup> The Japanese even considered the possibility of invading Mongol territory.<sup>119</sup> Perhaps the Japanese' most important defensive preparation, however, was the construction of a large stone wall around Hakata Bay.

In 1276, the bakufu issued levies calling for the construction of a huge stone defensive wall, completely encircling Hakata Bay.<sup>120</sup> The wall was 12.4 miles long<sup>121</sup> and approximately 15 feet high.<sup>122</sup> It was specially designed so that the side facing away from the coast was slanted, permitting both cavalry and dismounted defenders to mount the wall quickly and easily.<sup>123</sup> Bulwarks were also raised.<sup>124</sup> Defensive preparations were not limited to Hakata Bay as the Kamakura government also ordered coastal defenses built on the west coast of the main island of Honshu, in case an invasion came there.<sup>125</sup>

In order to streamline command and control, shogun Hojo Tokimune appointed his cousin Hojo Sanemasa as Commander of all military forces in Middle and Southern Japan.<sup>126</sup> He also issued orders stating that any Mongol found in Japan be summarily executed,<sup>127</sup> ordered all samurai in Japan to report for guard duty,<sup>128</sup> and created a

permanent coastal garrison.<sup>129</sup> Some samurai leaders also considered conducting a pre-emptive naval raid against Mongol territory. This proposal was rejected as being too expensive to carry out.<sup>130</sup>

Because the Japanese perceived Southern Sung China as coming increasingly under Mongol control, the Japanese government ordered all trade with the region ended in July 1277.<sup>131</sup> In 1279, a Chinese refugee reported that Southern Sung China had fallen to the Mongols, and that preparations were being made for a second invasion of Japan.<sup>132</sup> Upon the receipt of that news, Tokimune ordered all western Honshu and Shikoku military forces moved to Hakata Bay and moved his forces in northern Honshu to Tsuruga.<sup>133</sup> Clearly, by the time the Mongols invaded again in 1281, the Japanese were ready and waiting for them.

### Mongol Reaction

The Mongols did not launch a second attack on Japan right away. Naturally, having failed the first time, they realized that a larger and more comprehensive invasion would be necessary.<sup>134</sup> However, Khubilai Khan was too occupied with other matters to consider immediate military action against the Japanese. Before dealing with Japan, he had to put down revolts in Central Asia,<sup>135</sup> and complete his conquest of Southern Sung China.<sup>136</sup> In the meantime, Khubilai Khan made one last effort to subjugate Japan via diplomacy.

Khubilai Khan apparently did not acknowledge that his force had been defeated, and may have believed that his attempted invasion would frighten the Japanese into submission.<sup>137</sup> With that in mind, Khubilai assembled a diplomatic delegation, which he instructed to summon the Japanese Emperor to the Mongol Court to pay homage.<sup>138</sup> For

this mission, Khubilai chose five officials: his official of ceremony Tu-Shi-Chung, and generals Ho-wen-chu, Sa-tu-lu-ting, Hun-wi-koku-in, and So-chan.<sup>139</sup> The emissaries sailed for the Japanese main island of Honshu, and landed at the port of Murotsu in May 1275.<sup>140</sup>

Japanese officials at the port denied the emissaries entry, and ordered their ship to go to Kyushu.<sup>141</sup> Upon arrival there, the Dazaifu inquired with the bakufu as to what should be done about them. Hojo Tokimune then ordered the emissaries to be brought to his seat at Kamakura under guard.<sup>142</sup> At Kamakura, the emissaries pleaded with Tokimune to consider an alliance with Khubilai Khan and presented him with a gift of a golden cock.<sup>143</sup> However, Tokimune was not persuaded. He refused the offer, and, in October 1275, ordered the emissaries executed.<sup>144</sup>

The Mongols finally succeeded in conquering the Southern Sung in 1279. At this point, Khubilai Khan began preparations in earnest for another invasion of Japan. He ordered the King of Korea to build a fleet of 1,000 ships and raise an army of 20,000 troops.<sup>145</sup> He also ordered 50,000 Mongol troops to march to Korea and prepare for embarkation.<sup>146</sup> Khubilai then readied a fleet of thousands of ships and a force of 100,000 Chinese troops (nearly all of the remaining Sung military forces) on the Yang-tse River to prepare for embarkation as well.<sup>147</sup> Finally, he created a special “Office for the Chastisement of Japan” to supervise, plan, and coordinated the operation.<sup>148</sup> By August 1280, Khubilai Khan had finalized plans for a second invasion of Japan.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 99.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

- <sup>3</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>4</sup>Robert Marshall, *Storm from the East* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 220.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup>Thomas D. Conlan, *In Little Need of Divine Intervention: Takezaki Suenaga's Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 255.
- <sup>7</sup>Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo* (Hertfordshire, UK: Wordsworth Editions Limited 1997), 207-208.
- <sup>8</sup>David Winchester, *The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (UK: Belgarun Limited, 2008), 15.
- <sup>9</sup>George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 439.
- <sup>10</sup>Conlan, 255.
- <sup>11</sup>Nakaba Yamada, *Ghenko: The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1916), 76.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup>Winchester, 39.
- <sup>15</sup>Conlan, 257.
- <sup>16</sup>Yamada, 75.
- <sup>17</sup>Winchester, 39.
- <sup>18</sup>Rossabi, 99.
- <sup>19</sup>Stephen Turnbull, *The Samurai: A Military History* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1977), 87.
- <sup>20</sup>Rossabi, 99.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup>Sansom, 438.

<sup>23</sup>Yamada, 77.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Rossabi, 99.

<sup>26</sup>Yamada, 78.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 79.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>30</sup>Turnbull, 87.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Sansom, 440.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Yamada, 92.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 91-92.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 92.

<sup>40</sup>Sansom, 439.

<sup>41</sup>Yamada, 94.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>46</sup>Sansom, 441.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Yamada, 102.

<sup>51</sup>Sansom, 441.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 442.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Nakaba Yamada, *Ghenko: The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1916), 106; Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 6: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907-1368* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 483.

<sup>56</sup>Sansom, 442.

<sup>57</sup>Winchester, 48.

<sup>58</sup>Yamada, 130.

<sup>59</sup>Thomas D. Conlan electronic correspondence with MAJ Ryon Adams [author], 1 November 2008. Dr. Conlan is the author of *In Little Need of Divine Intervention: Takezaki Suenaga's Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), and a recognized expert in the attempted Mongol invasions of Japan.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Yamada, 107, 108.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 109-110.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 112-114.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 112-116.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 119.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 119-120.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 120.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 121-122.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 127.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 129.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 132-133.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 135.



<sup>92</sup>Winchester, 50.

<sup>93</sup>Winchester, 50; and Conlan, 263.

<sup>94</sup>Yamada, 135.

<sup>95</sup>Winchester, 50.

<sup>96</sup>Turnbull, 90.

<sup>97</sup>Winchester, 51.

<sup>98</sup>Yamada, 140.

<sup>99</sup>Winchester, 51.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Yamada, 140.

<sup>102</sup>Turnbull, 91.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Yamada, 142.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Turnbull, 91.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

<sup>108</sup>Yamada, 143.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 145.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 145-146.

<sup>112</sup>Turnbull, 91.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Sansom, 444.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

- <sup>116</sup>Conlan, 255.
- <sup>117</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>118</sup>Yamada, 174-175.
- <sup>119</sup>Turnbull, 92.
- <sup>120</sup>Conlan, 235.
- <sup>121</sup>James Delgado, "Relics of the Kamikaze," *Archaeology* 56, no. 1 (January/February 2003). <http://www.archaeology.org/0301/etc/kamikaze.html> (accessed March 6, 2009).
- <sup>122</sup>Turnbull, 92.
- <sup>123</sup>Yamada, 174.
- <sup>124</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>125</sup>Conlan, 241.
- <sup>126</sup>Yamada, 174.
- <sup>127</sup>Ibid., 173.
- <sup>128</sup>Conlan, 227.
- <sup>129</sup>Turnbull, 92.
- <sup>130</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>131</sup>Yamada, 176.
- <sup>132</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>133</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>134</sup>Woodbridge Bingham, Hilary Conroy, and Frank W. Ilke, *A History of Asia: Volume I to 1600* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964), 527.
- <sup>135</sup>Rossabi, 212.
- <sup>136</sup>Bingham, Conroy, and Ilke, 527.
- <sup>137</sup>Yamada, 148.
- <sup>138</sup>Ibid., 148-149.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 149.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., 149-150.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 150-154.

<sup>144</sup>Sansom, 445.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 448.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE SECOND INVASION (1281)

Having failed again at diplomatic efforts, Khubilai Khan now marshaled his forces for a second, and even larger, invasion of Japan. The planning for the invasion was not without pitfalls, however. The Korean economy, which contributed large amounts of grain and personnel for the 1274 invasion, took a long time to recover.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, planning and preparation continued. By 1280, Khubilai's force was ready.<sup>2</sup> However, before attacking, Khubilai Khan decided to send one last diplomatic mission to Japan in 1279. As had been the case with the last mission, Hojo Tokimune intercepted the emissaries, accused them of being spies, and had them all beheaded.<sup>3</sup> A second invasion was now inevitable.

#### The Massive Invasion Fleet Gets Underway

Mongol plans for the second invasion of Japan were finalized in 1280. Mongol records from 1281 described the finalization of the operational concept:

In August last year the King of Korea came to Changan-nor and was received in audience by the Great Khan. In consultation with the king and the generals the plan of attack was agreed upon. Ships carrying 40,000 Mongol, Korean, and North China troops were to rendezvous off the island of Iki with a fleet carrying 100,000 South China troops, and then proceed to crush Japan.<sup>4</sup>

Other Mongol records show a high level of optimism that the invasion would succeed in overcoming Japanese resistance and destroying the bakufu:

They would all meet on the island of Iki and with united forces go straight to the Japanese headquarters. Then victory would be certain.<sup>5</sup>

On January 4th, 1281, Khubilai Khan gave the final order to execute the invasion.<sup>6</sup> To command this massive allied force, Khubilai Khan chose commanders

from each of the three major nationalities in the force. He appointed Hong Tagu, a Korean, to serve as the force's naval commander, at the insistence of the Korean King.<sup>7</sup> He tapped Fan Wen-hu, a Chinese Southern Sung general, to command the large Chinese contingent, and Hsin-tu, a Mongol, to command the Mongol forces.<sup>8</sup> Khindu was once again given overall command of the forces.<sup>9</sup>

The Mongols made various attempts to correct their previous mistakes. Archers, whether Mongol, Chinese, or Korean, were equipped with coats of mail in order to protect against Japanese arrows and naginatas.<sup>10</sup> This was, of course, a significant change as Mongol troops were generally more lightly armored in order to make them more mobile.<sup>11</sup> However, losses during the first invasion had obviously caused a paradigm shift in Mongol military thinking, and this time around, the Mongols made a deliberate attempt to reduce the effectiveness of the Japanese forces.<sup>12</sup>

The coordinated effort experienced problems almost from the outset. The Korean force of 900 vessels with 40,000 troops was ready to depart from Haplo in the spring, but problems in manning and provisioning the much larger South Chinese fleet of 2,600 warships delayed its departure.<sup>13</sup> An epidemic among the crews created further delays.<sup>14</sup> The Korean commanders, rather than waiting for their Chinese allies to be ready, decided to attempt an assault on the nearby island of Tsushima on May 21, 1281.<sup>15</sup> Unlike in 1274, on this occasion, the island of Tsushima was well prepared for attack, and the Mongol force was quickly beaten back.<sup>16</sup> It returned to Korea to make further preparations.

Finally, in the summer of 1281, both fleets were ready. On June 10th, the Korean fleet, without waiting for its Chinese allies, attacked the island of Iki and won a quick

victory.<sup>17</sup> One small element then broke off and sailed north for a feigned attack on Honshu on June 21st.<sup>18</sup> The fleet then sailed for Hakata Bay. On June 23-24, the Mongols attempted two landings on Shiga Island, at the mouth of Hakata Bay. On both occasions, the Japanese beat back the Mongol invaders, and in one of the attacks, Hong Tagu was nearly killed.<sup>19</sup>

The invaders then attempted to seize the Shiga spit just to the North of the Hakata Bay defense walls in an effort to turn the Japanese flank. Once again, Japanese resistance was fierce. The Japanese succeeded in moving troops quickly back and forth to reinforce their defenses and largely beat back the attacks.<sup>20</sup> On June 30th, the fleet attempted to regroup and land a second time.<sup>21</sup> Again, their attempts to land were repulsed. The hot weather conditions caused several of their ships to begin to rot, and an epidemic broke out among those onboard.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, Japanese raiding parties rode out regularly in small boats to harass the fleet, causing additional casualties. The samurai typically closed with a Mongol vessel, knock down one of the masts to use for boarding, and then engaged the Mongols at close quarters.<sup>23</sup>

One July 16th, the Southern fleet finally arrived at Iki Island after several days. It linked up with the Korean fleet between Hirato and Shiga, and then moved towards the coast. By now, the walls around Hakata were overflowing with samurai defenders.<sup>24</sup> The combined Mongol fleet, in order to protect itself from Japanese raiding parties, used large iron chains to link their vessels together in a huge cordon.<sup>25</sup> In this tight formation, the Mongols succeeded in fending off further Japanese raiding parties, and were able to fire catapults and other artillery weapons against the attackers.<sup>26</sup> However, the Mongol fleet, for a time, did not attempt any additional landings.<sup>27</sup>

Soon, the situation became more problematic for the Mongols. Reinforcements kept pouring in from throughout Japan to reinforce Hakata's defenses, and tensions soon developed among the Mongol Commanders.<sup>28</sup> Chinese conscripts, who now made up the bulk of the Army, had little stake in the fight, and showed little enthusiasm.<sup>29</sup> When the Mongols finally attempted to land some of their forces, they found themselves out in the open and exposed to enemy fire. The Chinese forces, in particular, did not put up a strong fight against the Japanese.<sup>30</sup> A stalemate developed that continued for weeks.<sup>31</sup>

Weather forces soon brought about the end to Khubilai Khan's expedition, though at this point, the Mongols appeared to be making no progress. Typhoons hit Japan regularly during the summer and early fall, and on August 15, 1281, a huge storm began to kick up around Hakata Bay.<sup>32</sup> The Mongol vessels, all chained together, were helpless against the winds, and soon began crashing into each other. Other vessels were dashed against the shore.<sup>33</sup> Thousands of Mongol and Chinese warriors drowned.<sup>34</sup> Some vessels managed to escape to sea, but a majority of the vessels were swamped.<sup>35</sup>

A minority of vessels, including the ones carrying Admiral Fan Wen-Hu and General Chang Hsi, managed to escape to Taka Island.<sup>36</sup> One group of boats, led by Fan Wen-Hu, decided to sail back to Korea. Another group of about 2,000 warriors under Chang Hsi decided to remain.<sup>37</sup> Shortly after the storm died down, a group of about 5,000 samurai sailed out to attack the survivors, killing over 500 Mongols, including the general. The remaining 1,500 or so then surrendered.<sup>38</sup> All of the captives were enslaved except for three, who were allowed to return to China in order to inform Khubilai Khan of their defeat.<sup>39</sup> The second Mongol invasion of Japan was now at an end, with the Mongols totally defeated.

The typhoon certainly played a role in the defeat of the second Mongol invasion. However, the storm really just represented the final element of a more comprehensive defeat and was hardly the sole or even the primary cause of the Japanese victory. The Mongols failed to advance for nearly two months against fierce and well-organized Japanese resistance. The Chinese forces that made up the bulk of the Mongol invasion force were in a state of near mutiny, and Japanese defensive fortifications proved formidable. During the encounters between Japanese and Mongol forces on Shiga spit and elsewhere, the samurai more than held their own, and the Mongols appeared to be nowhere close to victory. All that the storms truly did was to provide a final blow to a military expedition that had essentially gone badly for the Mongols.

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<sup>1</sup>Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 208.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 448-449.

<sup>5</sup>Mark Winchester, *The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (UK: Belgarun, 2008), 56.

<sup>6</sup>Sansom, 449.

<sup>7</sup>Rossabi, 208.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Winchester, 55.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.



<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Sansom, 178-179.

<sup>14</sup>Nakaba Yamada, *Ghenko: The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1916), 182.

<sup>15</sup>George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958) 449, and Mark Winchester, *The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (UK: Belgarun, 2008), 56.

<sup>16</sup>Sansom, 449.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Stephen Turnbull, *The Samurai: A Military History* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1977), 92.

<sup>19</sup>Winchester, 56.

<sup>20</sup>Turnbull, 92.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid, 93. From the source (Turnbull) it is not certain where the Mongols attempted this second landing, as the source merely states that they attempted to land “farther along the coast.” Although we can presume that this means that they attempted to land farther north than Hakata Bay, but that is not entirely clear.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Yamada, 183-184.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 185.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 186.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 187.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 191-192.

<sup>29</sup>Rossabi, 211.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Yamada 193; and Stephen Turnbull, 93.

<sup>33</sup>Yamada, 193-194.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 194.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 195.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 196-197.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 197.

## CHAPTER 6

### STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

The thesis of this work incorporates the notion that factors other than the weather, including strategy, played a primary role in the Mongol defeat. This chapter will analyze the Mongol invasions from several different strategic perspectives. It will begin by performing an analysis on the four instruments of national power (diplomatic, informational, military, and economic), and then proceed to look at various operational and tactical errors that also could have contributed to the Mongol demise. Chapter 7 will provide additional analysis utilizing the principles of Sun Tzu.

#### DIME Analysis

Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations*, states that the United States, as a nation, wages war using four instruments of national power: diplomatic, informational, military, and economic.<sup>1</sup> These instruments of national power are sometimes referred to by the acronym “DIME,” and analysis based upon these instruments is sometimes referred to as “DIME analysis.” While JP 3-0 is a U.S. document, this author believes that DIME principles are essentially universal, and that it is useful to look at the four instruments of national power and determine whether or not the Mongols applied them properly. If they did not, then it could provide insight as to the strategic failures that contributed to the Mongol defeat.

The Mongols certainly attempted to apply the “diplomatic” instrument of national power but were unsuccessful. Their first delegation failed to reach Japan at all due to the weather.<sup>2</sup> A second diplomatic maneuver in 1268 involved the delivery of a letter from

Khubilai Khan via Korean envoys to the Emperor of Japan.<sup>3</sup> While it certainly made sense to send a Korean envoy in order to avoid any risk to his own personnel, the choice of words in the letter was extremely poor. Khubilai's reference to the Japanese emperor as a mere "King," and moreover, his implication that Japan was a "small state" were obviously very insulting to Japan's proud samurai society and undoubtedly caused serious offense.<sup>4</sup> It is hardly any wonder that these early missions failed to achieve their objectives of subjugating Japan.

Later diplomatic missions in 1271 and 1272 also failed to achieve their objectives. The 1272 mission included a letter that threatened Japan with an invasion.<sup>5</sup> Such a letter could do little else besides cause great alarm among the Japanese, and force them to immediately begin making defensive preparations.<sup>6</sup> That letter essentially put Japan on a state of full alert and gave the nation ample opportunity to mobilize forces and prepare a defensive strategy. Thus, rather than subduing the Japanese, Khubilai's poor diplomatic efforts contributed to the successful Japanese resistance by essentially tipping them off that an invasion could be imminent and provoking them into undertaking efforts to oppose it. It effectively took away any element of surprise. A more effective diplomatic strategy might have involved negotiation rather than threats and might have attempted to forge an alliance. Alternately, a more effective strategy might have considered the pride of the Japanese people and culture, and avoided the use of deprecating language. Perhaps a more complimentary use of language could have helped to forge an alliance, rather than provoke a defensive reaction. Naturally, following their victory in the first invasion, the Japanese were in no mood to negotiate with an invader that they had already vanquished, and it is hardly shocking that they executed Khubilai Khan's 1275 and 1279 delegations.<sup>7</sup>

By that point, Khubilai's diplomatic ventures had proven wholly unsuccessful, and only through the use of other instruments of national power would he have any hope for victory.

Unfortunately, Khubilai fared little better in the use of the "informational" instrument of national power. During both of Khubilai's invasions, for example, he essentially "tipped off" the main islands as to the impending invasions by attempting to seize islands in the straits between Japan and Korea. While these operations may have been intended to secure staging bases to support the invasions of the main islands, on both occasions, they gave the Japanese the opportunity to alert the main island and allowed the samurai to muster their defenses.<sup>8</sup> Those preliminary operations effectively took away any element of surprise that the Mongols might have had by proceeding directly to Hakata Bay, and undoubtedly hindered their efforts by giving the Japanese the opportunity to bolster their defenses. The information flow between the islands in the straits and the Japanese main islands thus proved to be decisive in giving the Japanese the notice that they needed in order to prepare a successful defense. Of course, the fact that the Mongols landed at the same place twice further eroded any efforts at deception that might have created an advantage as well.

The Mongols' psychological tactics proved no more successful. The tacking of slain Japanese to the sides of their ships did not have the effect of frightening the Japanese off. Indeed, the Japanese were horrified, but their resistance proved to be as heroic as ever.<sup>9</sup> If anything, this tactic emboldened the Japanese, rather than scaring them off. Finally, the Mongols were unable to prevent Chinese sailors from going to Japan and warning the Japanese that an invasion was imminent, thus giving the Japanese

further opportunities to prepare for a defense and further eroding any element of surprise.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that the Mongols failed in all aspects of information warfare, as the Japanese were not persuaded by Mongol psychological operations, and the Mongols were incapable of preventing information on their impending operations from leaking out to the Japanese in advance. These failures, which were totally independent of any climatic or environmental factors, contributed to the Mongol defeat.

The Mongols apparently made little use of the “economic” instrument of national power. However, they obviously attempted to use the “military” instrument, by conducting two separate invasions. These invasions, as we have seen proved to be completely unsuccessful, as the Japanese demonstrated themselves to be capable adversaries. All told, the Mongols failed to properly exercise three of the four instruments of national power. This study will now take a closer look at the “military” instrument, by examining some of the Mongol inadequacies at the operational and tactical levels.

### Defensive Operational Analysis

Military thinker Carl Von Clausewitz has stated that the defense is a stronger form of fighting than the attack.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, this proved to be the case for the Japanese, as the samurai succeeded on two different occasions in successfully defending their fortifications around Hakata Bay against their Mongol invaders. It is clear that the Japanese considered their superior fortifications to be among the most decisive factors in their victory.<sup>12</sup> During the first invasion, the Mongols were unable to assail the bulwarks around the Dazaifu, and in the second invasion, despite more than two months of warfare, the Mongols could not breach the huge defensive wall that the Japanese had erected

around Hakata Bay.<sup>13</sup> These Japanese successes bear out their superiority in the defense, a superiority that likely aided their victory and could have assured their victory even in the absence of major storms.

The Mongols were, as has already been mentioned, limited to invading at Hakata Bay, as it was the only area in Western Japan capable of holding such a large invasion fleet.<sup>14</sup> This, of course, was a huge advantage for the Japanese. Because they would have known that any major invasion would use Hakata as their seaport of debarkation, the Japanese were able to concentrate their forces and prepare formidable defenses at that one location. Although the Mongols could, conceivably, have used an alternate invasion site, they would have been unable to anchor their fleet and would almost certainly have had great difficulty in landing. In particular, the Japanese used this advantage in preparing for the second invasion when they constructed their ingenious wall to encircle the entire harbor and effectively prevent any landing.<sup>15</sup> An astute military operator might ask whether the Mongols attempted to outflank these defenses. Indeed, the Mongols did attempt, during their second invasion, to land at Shiga spit, just to the east of the defensive wall, in a flanking movement. However, the Japanese resistance there proved to be too strong, and the Mongols were forced to abandon that offensive.<sup>16</sup> Thus, for all the alleged fighting prowess of the Mongols, the Japanese proved to be more effective in defending their homeland than the Mongols were in attacking it. This study will now consider whether superior Japanese weaponry and fighting skill might have contributed a further non-climatic factor in the Japanese victory.

### The Superiority of the Samurai Fighters

The Japanese samurai had numerous advantages that undoubtedly aided them in defeating the Mongols. One advantage was in armor and weaponry. As this thesis pointed out in Chapter 3, the typical Japanese samurai was better protected in his standard armor than the typical Mongol fighter, who in many cases fought with only light armor, or no armor at all.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the Japanese often got the better of the Mongols in hand to hand fighting, exemplified by the events at Shiga spit.<sup>18</sup> This is easy to understand when one considers that a Japanese samurai, armed with a naginata would have enjoyed a reach advantage, in addition to being better protected.

The Japanese archery skills were also an important factor in Japanese victory. While the Japanese and Mongols were both known for their skill at archery, the Japanese had the advantage of being in the defense. Japanese archers, fighting behind their defensive walls, were able to maintain constant fire upon any attacking Mongols. During the second Mongol invasion in 1281, Chinese forces found themselves constantly exposed to fire and soon had little enthusiasm for continuing the attack; an obvious testament to Japanese prowess with the bow.<sup>19</sup>

Being a class of professional, elite warriors, and moreover, being motivated by a desire to defend their homeland, the samurai proved to have far more enthusiasm for the fight than the Chinese conscript fighters that made up the bulk of the second invasion force. Furthermore, even the Mongols, despite being better than nearly any other conventional force of their time, were not an elite fighting force. Indeed, the Mongols tended to fare more poorly when pitted against “elite” professional fighters such as the Mamluks and samurai.<sup>20</sup> In the end, the superiority of samurai weapons, armor, training,



and morale could have given them the capability of defeating the Mongols without the need of any great storms.

### The Concept of Tactical Culmination

U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-90 describes an enemy culminating point as that point at which an enemy must pause before it can continue, and where combat power ratios most favor the defending force.<sup>21</sup> During both the first and second Mongol invasions of Japan, this thesis argues that the Mongols reached their culminating point. FM 3-90 lists numerous indicators that might show when an enemy is reaching its culmination point, some of which include the following: enemy forces are defeated in most engagements, a noticeable reduction in the tempo of enemy operations occurs, enemy forces transition to the defense, and local counterattacks meet with unexpected success.<sup>22</sup> This thesis contends that one or more of these indicators were present during each of the Mongol invasions.

During the first invasion, the Mongols reached their culmination point when they attempted to storm the Japanese fortifications near the Dazaifu. At that point, the Mongols faced a predicament as they had run out of arrows.<sup>23</sup> This of course, would have meant that the Mongols were deprived of their preferred weapon as a result of poor logistics. Indeed, as the doctrinal definition of culminating point suggests, the Mongols did indeed have to pause and slowed-down their operations while they considered how they might continue their offensive, another indication of culmination.<sup>24</sup> It was not long after that the Mongols decided to return to their vessels.<sup>25</sup> While a storm did eventually come, by then, the Mongols had already been beaten back and were essentially defeated, having abandoned their offensive.

The events of the second invasion also indicate that the Mongol forces had culminated well before the arrival of a damaging typhoon. The Mongols were defeated near the Shiga spit and were unable to effect a landing on the beaches at Hakata.<sup>26</sup> The Chinese forces already started to bicker and were unwilling to undertake the withering fire from the Japanese.<sup>27</sup> The Mongols were already having difficulty fighting off small boat raids by the samurai and had to chain their fleet together to fend them off.<sup>28</sup> This indicates culmination, because it shows the Mongols transitioning to the defensive, in response to unexpectedly effective Japanese attacks. It appears that by the time the typhoon finally arrived, the Mongols had few prospects of successfully assailing the well-fortified Japanese defenders and were probably stalled.

Through a combination of Mongol failures in applying their instruments of national power, superior training and weaponry, and a superior defensive position, the Japanese were able to successfully thwart their Mongol invaders. When the storms finally came, they merely finished off an already defeated force. However, if the Mongols had consulted their Chinese subjects and considered the principles of Sun-Tzu, perhaps they could have avoided making many mistakes and been more successful. In the next chapter, this thesis will examine the principles of Sun-Tzu, and show how they might further explain the Mongol defeat.

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<sup>1</sup>Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-0: *Joint Operations*, Change 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), x.

<sup>2</sup>Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 99.

<sup>3</sup>Nakaba Yamada, *Ghenko: The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1916), 78-79.

<sup>4</sup>George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 450.

<sup>5</sup>Yamada, 102.

<sup>6</sup>Sansom, 441.

<sup>7</sup>Rossabi, 149.

<sup>8</sup>Yamada, 130-131, 180-181; and Stephen Turnbull, *The Samurai: A Military History* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1977), 91.

<sup>9</sup>Yamada, 135.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>11</sup>Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 24.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas D. Conlan, *In Little Need of Divine Intervention: Takezaki Suenaga's Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 267.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>Thomas D. Conlan electronic correspondence with MAJ Ryon Adams [author], 1 November 2008. Dr. Conlan is the author of *In Little Need of Divine Intervention: Takezaki Suenaga's Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), and a recognized expert in the attempted Mongol invasions of Japan.

<sup>15</sup>Conlan, 267.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>17</sup>Timothy May, *The Mongol Art of War* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2007), 53.

<sup>18</sup>Turnbull, 92.

<sup>19</sup>Rossabi, 211.

<sup>20</sup>Mark Winchester, *The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (UK: Belgarun, 2008), 12.

<sup>21</sup>Department of the Army, Army Field Manual 3-90, *Tactics* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2001), 8-42.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 8-43.

<sup>23</sup>Turnbull, 91.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Yamada, 143.

<sup>26</sup>Conlan, 267-268.

<sup>27</sup>Turnbull, 92; and Rossabi, 211.

<sup>28</sup>Yamada, 183-185.

## CHAPTER 7

### PERSPECTIVES OF SUN-TZU

*The Art of War* by Sun-Tzu was one of the seven military classics whose study was required for all men seeking a Chinese army commission in Mongol times.<sup>1</sup> As this thesis has already discussed, a large majority of the second Mongol invasion force was Chinese, as was one of its generals.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, even at the time of the first Mongol invasion, Khubilai Khan had many Chinese advisors.<sup>3</sup> While there is obviously no proof that Khubilai Khan, the Mongol ruler, was familiar with Sun-Tzu, it is very reasonable to believe that Khan's Chinese advisors, generals, and other officers would have been familiar with Sun-Tzu and his principles. However, this thesis will show that the Mongol strategy ignored several key principles described in *The Art of War*, principles which, if followed, might have assisted the Mongol effort. The failure of the Mongols to follow these principles likely contributed to their defeat.

*The Art of War* is organized into estimates, waging war, offensive strategies, dispositions, energy, weaknesses and strengths, maneuver, marches, terrain, attack by fire, and the employment of secret agents. The work consists mostly of short, axiomatic principles, with relatively little in the way of an overall framework. This thesis will argue that the Mongols largely ignored several key principles related to estimates, dispositions, maneuver, and terrain.

#### Lack of Deception

In Sun-Tzu's sections on estimates and maneuver, he discusses the core principle that warfare is a matter of deception. He writes:

All warfare is based on deception.<sup>4</sup>

Now war is based on deception.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, Sun-Tzu considered deception to be an essential and even decisive element in warfare. However, the Mongol strategy made little effort to deceive the Japanese, and more often than not gave the Japanese tips that an invasion was in the offing.

Consider Khubilai Khan's diplomatic missions. One of them openly threatened an invasion in the event that the Japanese did not submit to Mongol suzerainty.<sup>6</sup> It is hardly surprising that the Japanese immediately began making defensive preparations, preparations that assisted in their victory.<sup>7</sup> A better strategy would have been to launch a surprise attack that could catch the Japanese unprepared and improve the Mongol chances for victory. If the Mongols had considered the value of deception as Sun-Tzu suggests, perhaps they would have adopted a better strategy

The military aspects of the Mongol campaign are also nearly devoid of any attempt to utilize deception. The Mongols invaded, predictably, in the location where their fleet could land most easily, Hakata Bay.<sup>8</sup> It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Japanese were prepared for their arrival and ready for the defense. Moreover, the Mongols invaded the same location twice, failing to even consider a strategy that might include an attack at a surprise location. The Mongol attacks on Iki and Tsushima islands had the further effect of alerting the Japanese that an invasion of the mainland was imminent, once again ruining the element of surprise and giving the Japanese the opportunity to prepare for an obvious invasion.<sup>9</sup>

### The Japanese Advantage in Defense

Sun-Tzu argues in his section on dispositions that the defense enjoys an advantage over the offense:

Invincibility lies in the defence; the possibility of victory in the attack.<sup>10</sup>

In this regard, the Japanese enjoyed more than just a slight advantage over the Mongols. Rather, they arguably enjoyed a decisive one.

During both invasions, the Japanese beat the attacking Mongols back from strongly held defensive positions. During the first invasion, the Japanese succeeded in stopping the Mongols outside the Dazaifu, and in the second, Japan's large defensive wall prevented the Mongols from executing a successful landing.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, during the second invasion, the Japanese were able to break Chinese morale through the withering fire they affected from their fortifications.<sup>12</sup> A Shiga spit, the Japanese were quickly able to move reinforcements back and forth along the wall preventing a Mongol flanking maneuver.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, the Japanese were invincible in the defense, and the storms merely completed the victory that their defenses had already helped to bring about.

### The Ground Was a Marked Disadvantage

The location of the two Mongol invasions, Hakata Bay, proved to be a huge advantage for the Japanese, if one applies the principles of Sun-Tzu. This advantage could very well have been decisive. In his section on the varieties of ground, Sun-Tzu writes the following:

Ground to which access is constricted, where the way out is tortuous, and where a small enemy force can strike my larger one is called "encircled." Here it is easy to lay ambushes and one can be utterly defeated.<sup>14</sup>

This almost perfectly describes the advantage that the Japanese enjoyed over the Mongols at Hakata Bay during the second invasion in 1281. The Japanese completely surrounded the bay with defensive fortification, effectively constricting the Mongol invasion fleet.<sup>15</sup> Samurai raiding parties in small boats were able to constantly sail out and attack the larger Mongol fleet, causing damage, and forcing the Mongols to chain their fleet together in defense.<sup>16</sup> As Sun-Tzu surmises, it was in fact possible for the Japanese to utterly defeat the Mongols, as they had stalemated their invasion, and forced culmination. These factors, completely exclusive of any storms, contributed to Japanese victory.

Sun-Tzu also admonishes his readers not to attack when the enemy is in charge of key terrain: “Do not attack an enemy that occupies key ground.”<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the Mongols failed to heed this advice. Despite the fact that the Japanese fortifications gave them command of all the beaches in 1281, and made a landing impossible, the Mongols continued with the invasion, eventually culminating in a stalemate. At that point, victory was effectively impossible, and Japanese victory assured.

These are, of course, just a few of the many principles espoused by Sun-Tzu. However, they are very essential and could have contributed to the Mongol defeat. Indeed, had Khubilai’s Chinese advisors considered these principles, their strategy could have changed, possibly altering the outcome of the campaign.

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<sup>1</sup>Sun-Tzu, *The Art of War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1963), 1.

<sup>2</sup>Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 118; and Robert Marshall, *Storm from the East* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 195.

<sup>3</sup>Rossabi, 118.



<sup>4</sup>Sun-Tzu, 66.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 106.

<sup>6</sup>Nakaba Yamada, *Ghenko: The Mongol Invasions of Japan* (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1916), 102.

<sup>7</sup>George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 441.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas D. Conlan, electronic correspondence with MAJ Ryon Adams [author], 1 November 2008. Dr. Conlan is the author of *In Little Need of Divine Intervention: Takezaki Suenaga's Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), and a recognized expert in the attempted Mongol invasions of Japan.

<sup>9</sup>Yamada, 133.

<sup>10</sup>Sun-Tzu, 66.

<sup>11</sup>Thomas D. Conlan, *In Little Need of Divine Intervention: Takezaki Suenaga's Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 267.

<sup>12</sup>Stephen Turnbull, *The Samurai: A Military History* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1977), 92; and Rossabi, 211.

<sup>13</sup>Turnbull, 92.

<sup>14</sup>Sun-Tzu, 131.

<sup>15</sup>Conlan, 267.

<sup>16</sup>Yamada, 185-186.

<sup>17</sup>Sun-Tzu, 131.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

A combination of Mongol errors in strategy, operations, and tactics, superior Japanese fighting skills, and a misapplication by the Mongols of the instruments of national power led to the Japanese victory over the Mongols. However, despite the fact that the wars themselves had a clear winner and loser, in the end, the invasions proved disastrous for both governments. The study of the Mongol invasions of Japan is relevant to today's officer because it provides many lessons learned in strategic, operational, and tactical analysis.

#### Mongol Aftermath

Khubilai Khan was, of course, furious upon learning of the Mongol defeat. In 1283, he ordered the construction of a new invasion fleet. He also ordered Korea to provide grain in preparation for a new expedition against the Japanese.<sup>1</sup> However, resistance soon developed to his plans, and in 1286, acting according to the wishes of his advisors, Khubilai abandoned his plans for another invasion of Japan.<sup>2</sup>

The effects of the Mongol defeat upon Khubilai Khan's empire were devastating. The myth of Mongol invincibility among its subjects was broken, and the empire lost much of its image of power.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the financial outlays of the empire had been squandered on the outfitting of the invasions, causing a significant crisis. The Mongols were forced to turn to advisors that were widely despised by the Chinese in order to deal with the problem.<sup>4</sup>

In the years following the defeat of his forces in Japan, Khubilai Khan became increasingly withdrawn and reclusive. He ate and drank heavily and became overweight.<sup>5</sup> Khubilai Khan died in 1294. His successors ushered in an era of peace and prosperity in China, but after 1332 factionalism began to develop and in 1368, the Chinese succeeded in overthrowing the Mongols and ushering in the new Ming dynasty.

### Japanese Aftermath

At first, the Japanese victory over the Mongols was the cause of much celebration. The Emperor Kameyama held a huge service at the Iwashimizu Shrine, which featured readings from the entire Buddhist canon to commemorate the event.<sup>6</sup> However, the long-term effects of the Mongol invasions proved to be harmful. The bakufu, worried about the possibility of another invasion, continued running the country on a wartime basis until Khubilai Khan's death in 1294.<sup>7</sup> The result was a serious drain on manpower that could have been devoted to more productive occupations.<sup>8</sup>

Even worse for Japan's government, however, were the demands that the samurai placed upon the bakufu for the customary rewards for their service.<sup>9</sup> These demands caused serious problems, as the financial resources of the government had largely been drained, making it difficult for the government to pay.<sup>10</sup> Animosity to the government grew among many vassals, weakening Japan's feudal structure.<sup>11</sup> The bakufu was soon besieged with lawsuits from disgruntled warriors.<sup>12</sup> Japan's religious shrines and monasteries, claiming that their prayers had helped save Japan, soon joined the samurai in making demands for rewards.<sup>13</sup>

Only a few short years after his greatest victory, Hojo Tokimune became ill. He died in 1284 at the age of thirty-four.<sup>14</sup> His son, Sadatoki, became the new regent at the

age of only fourteen.<sup>15</sup> The bakufu soon ran out of rewards to distribute, and many of its vassals and retainers began selling their lands. Many of them became indebted to Japan's new mercantile class.<sup>16</sup>

Sadatoki resigned in 1301 to join a monastery.<sup>17</sup> From that point forward, plots against the Hojo government became increasingly frequent.<sup>18</sup> Civil war soon broke out, and in 1334, Hojo rule came to an end.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, the success of the bakufu in defending Japan against the Mongols created such a financial crisis that their entire government was undone.

#### Relevance for Today's Officer

The study of the Mongol invasions of Japan is relevant for a number of reasons. First of all, it shows what can happen, operationally, when basic military concepts such as deception are disregarded. As this thesis argues, the Mongols made a number of diplomatic, operational, and tactical moves that helped to put the Japanese military forces on alert and took away any element of surprise. A prudent commander or operational planner in today's army would be well-advised to learn from this lesson, avoid activities that reveal their plans and objectives to the enemy, and consequently give the enemy the opportunity to strengthen his defenses.

The campaigns also teach important lessons in the art of warfare. They show from the perspectives of both Clausewitz and Sun-Tzu that the defense is the strongest position in warfare. A commander or operational planner that desires to go on the offensive would be wise to heed Sun-Tzu's warning that attack only offers the possibility of victory, while invincibility lies in the defense.<sup>20</sup> This will teach them to consider the defending side's capabilities, and prepare an overwhelming force with which to

overcome it. It will also encourage them to more effectively deceive the defenders and avoid moving straight into the heart of their defenses.

Finally, the Mongol invasions of Japan teach today's officer that one must not continue a fight that has lasted beyond the point of culmination. When critical supplies, such as ammunition, run out, a military force must not continue on the offensive but rather should consider changing its course of action. Unlike the Mongols, who waited too long before discontinuing their first invasion when they ran out of arrows, commanders today must immediately make arrangements for re-supply, do a better job of forecasting ammunition requirements, and most importantly must ensure the safety of his forces through retrograde operations rather than staying and subjecting his forces to the enemy and the environment. Naturally, when offensive operations have stalemated, and morale is low, as it was with the Mongols during the second invasion, commanders and staff officers must reconsider their operations, priorities, and objectives.

#### Final Thoughts

The Mongol invasions of Japan represented the first occasion on which a full-strength Mongol invasion force was defeated and were the high watermark of Japanese samurai military prowess. Although both of the Mongol invasions ended with damaging storms, the Mongol failure to use the instruments of national power properly, the Japanese superiority in defensive fortifications and armaments, and the effectiveness of the Japanese fighting forces ensured a Japanese victory. The Mongols were outthought and outfought by the Japanese. The storms, upon close examination, merely finished off Mongol invasions that had already culminated and been defeated. The study of the

Mongol invasions of Japan provides important, relevant lessons for both scholars and military leaders today.

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<sup>1</sup>Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 212.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 212-213.

<sup>5</sup>Robert Marshall, *Storm from the East* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 232-233.

<sup>6</sup>George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 451.

<sup>7</sup>Woodbridge Bingham, Hilary Conroy, and Frank W. Ilke, *A History of Asia: Volume I to 1600* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1964), 528.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Sanson, 454.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Bingham, Conroy, and Ilke, 528.

<sup>13</sup>Sansom, 454.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 453.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 456-457.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 460.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 461.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 464-467.

<sup>20</sup>Sun-Tzu, *The Art of War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1963) 66. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 24.

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